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Educator Perspectives on English Learner Identification: An Explanatory Mixed Methods Study

Rachel E. Hoffman
University of Massachusetts Boston

EDUCATOR PERSPECTIVES ON ENGLISH LEARNER IDENTIFICATION: AN EXPLANATORY MIXED METHODS STUDY

A Dissertation Presented

by

RACHEL E. HOFFMAN

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Approved as to style and content by:

_____
Wenfan Yan, Professor
Chairperson of Committee

_____
Zeena Zakharia, Assistant Professor
Member

_____
Esta Montano, Adjunct Professor
Framingham State University
Member

_____
Francine Menashy, Program Director
Urban Education, Leadership and Policy Studies Program

_____
Tara L. Parker, Chairperson
Leadership in Education Department

ABSTRACT

EDUCATOR PERSPECTIVES ON ENGLISH LEARNER IDENTIFICATION: AN EXPLANATORY MIXED METHODS STUDY

December 2020

Rachel E. Hoffman, B.A., Gordon College
M.A.T., Salem State University
Ph.D., University of Massachusetts Boston

Directed by Professor Wenfan Yan

The purpose of this study was to explore English learner identification and placement through the lens of teacher knowledge and attitude, with the goal of identifying ways to ensure that the intended outcome (correct identification and placement) occurs. Employing explanatory mixed methods research, data was collected from teachers and other educators in the Jackson* Public School district through both a web administered survey and one to one phone interviews. The survey data showed that the number of ELs that an educator has had in the past few years had a statistically significant effect on educator knowledge, but none of the tested demographic variables had a significant effect on educator attitude. The interview data helped to explain the survey findings, as educators shared their experiences with English

* pseudonym

learners in their classrooms and on their caseloads. This study will help guide future inquiry about “leveling the playing field” for educators working with English learners by identifying environments and circumstances that could be replicated in order to improve educators’ knowledge and influence educators’ attitudes about English learner identification and placement.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my grandmother and hero Dr. Eleanor Jeanne Pease. She earned her PhD online (with a dial-up modem!) in 2006 at the age of 70. She trusted in me and believed in me enough to bring me abroad, teach me my first college course, and subsequently give me my own small classroom of kindergartners who were learning English— and I was only 14 years old! Most importantly, she and my beloved grandfather Rev. Dr. Richard Pease pray for me every day and have set an example of what it means to be a follower of Jesus. Being a third generation ESL teacher has become my legacy, and I want nothing more than to be remembered for the ways that I amplified others' voices in my life and work, just as my mother and grandmother have done and continue to do to this day.

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Jaxx— you were born in the middle of this chaos and I wouldn't have it any other way. I hope that someday you'll read my dissertation (or at least this part!) and be reminded of who you are— a son and great-grandson of two strong women with PhDs. Even at the age of 3, your kindness and intellect blow me away. You have a great sense of humor (I'd like to think you got that from me) and an amazing memory. So, if you do remember this time, know that I was doing this all for you!

Baby J— you were born in the last week of revisions and, just like your brother, the timing of your arrival was perfect. I'm writing this from the hospital room as you are snuggled up with your dad. Thank you for the reminder of how beautiful life is.

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Finally, to all of my students— past, present, and future: I will forever be grateful for all of you. Your story matters!

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

School registration is the initial point of contact between public schools and families with school-age children in the United States. This interaction serves several purposes including collecting prior schooling information and academic records, as well as guiding placement. The assessment and subsequent placement of students, though important for all students and families, is especially impactful on children and families who speak a language other than or in addition to English. At the point of registration, a student's English proficiency can be assessed and, based on the results of the assessment, he or she can be formally identified as an English Learner (EL). This identification affects the type of instruction that a student will receive, thus making the designation important to the educators who work with the student. In the United States, the number of English learner students has increased significantly over the past several decades. Currently, there are 4.3 million English learner students in U.S. schools, which is approximately 9% of all enrolled students (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2016). This designation is an integral component of a student's academic identity, as it affects student placement and the type of instruction or instructional support a student receives.

Problem of Practice

If the goal of proper identification and placement is that a student is placed in an educational environment that is designed to meet his/her needs, then educators must have the knowledge required to execute this: not necessarily just pedagogical knowledge, but also knowledge of a students' proficiency level, background, and the overall process of assessment, identification, and placement. The issue of proper identification and placement as it pertains to a student's proficiency in English can be seen from a variety of perspectives. Through my lens as an ESL (English as a Second Language) teacher and, more recently, an ELE (English Language Education) coordinator, I see this issue as one which stems from the practices associated with identification. In an ideal world, the practices associated with school registration and English learner identification would not be affected by bias, inconsistencies in implementation, etc. However, the reality is that this process is enacted within a sociocultural context (in a school district that is situated in a specific geographic location) and is conducted by humans (stakeholders such as educators, students, and families). Like any other human process, the identification and placement of English learners can lead to the correct outcome (a placement that will serve to meet the needs of the student) an improper designation, or an outcome that is somewhere in between. It should be noted, however, that there is little consensus on what defines eligibility to be identified as an "English learner" in the United States and so different states have different definitions, cut scores, etc. (Gottlieb, 2008). The lack of consensus on the definition of English learner makes it even more difficult to measure the outcomes of the identification and placement process.

Though it could be argued that giving students the "label" of English Learner may hurt the student, the policies that lead to this designation are designed to protect all students' rights to an education that they can access. Research on students who receive support in English acquisition shows that identified English learners do, in fact, have improved educational outcomes (Ross et al., 2012; Shin, 2018). In my experience, I have observed both the phenomenon of students being labeled as an English learner but not needing support in his/her language development and the phenomenon of a student who needs support with his/her language development and is not given the designation of English learner. These inconsistent outcomes have led me to question what factors affect the identification process.

In my most recent professional role, I was the ELE coordinator in a network of schools for students with cognitive and/or emotional/behavioral disabilities. Though I had observed over- and under- identification in my previous roles, what I observed in this network of schools was that there was very little guidance on how this process should be adapted to meet the needs of English learners with disabilities. These observations, along with those from my previous experience as a teacher, led me to question how and why the process does not always lead to proper identification for *all* students. Before the question of *why* could be answered, however, the question of educator perceptions of identification and placement needed to be explored at length. According to the adults who spend the most time with these students in school (classroom teachers and other educators), does this process (one designed to meet the needs of students) consistently meet the intended outcome, and do these adults have the necessary knowledge to meet these students' needs?

Purpose and Rationale for Study

The purpose of this study was to understand whether the process of school registration (and subsequent assessment and placement) leads to the intended outcome. Based on the problem of practice and a review of relevant literature (see Chapter 2), I asked the following questions:

- What knowledge do educators of English learners have about the process of identification and placement and how might an educator's background (demographic data) influence this knowledge?
- What are educators' attitudes about the process of English learner identification and placement and how might an educator's background (demographic data) influence these attitudes?

In this particular study, the concepts of knowledge and attitude are self-reported. In this paper, when knowledge and attitude are discussed in the context of the data, the terms are referring to stated and/or reported knowledge and attitude. If the goal of identifying English learners is to support English acquisition, the process of identification should lead to this intended outcome. If this outcome is not always reached, there must be factors that are affecting the implementation of these processes. My initial hypothesis was that there was a lack of authentic praxis (Freire, 1970/2000) within the organizations that implement English learner identification processes. Praxis is the enacting of theory, so, in this case, the stakeholders that are performing the identification process are not adhering to their stated goals in the actions that are performed. The goal of these programs is most often some iteration of the U.S. Department of Education's Office of English Language Acquisition's (OELA, 2018) mission, which is to "help ensure that English Learners and immigrant

students attain English proficiency and achieve academic success" (para. 1). If the stated goal is not what is being acted upon, it leads one to assume that the organizations are acting out another theory that is not entirely consistent with helping ELs attain English proficiency and achieve academic success. Thus, the problem here is likely inauthentic praxis. If organizations are not meeting the intended outcome, the practice of identification could end up being detrimental for some students. For other students, inauthentic praxis may just lead to the students not receiving as much help as they should, though there may still be some positive outcomes from the identification process and subsequent placement. School registration (and the embedded process of English learner identification) is the process by which a child's educational trajectory is determined and, at its critical point, needs to be a process that is correctly determining placement for *all* students.

Throughout this program, I have been taught that educators can and should help students and their families find their voices, not just speak for them. Taken nearly literally, this is the incredible opportunity that teachers and other educators of English learners have: to help students learn a language that will not just open doors for them, but also allow them to speak for what is right and true in the world. Educators, however, must have the necessary background and professional development to support English learners. Even more important is that students are identified and placed properly so that their needs can be met. This is how teachers and other educators become some of the most vital pieces of this puzzle: they are the ones who spend their time with English learner students. They are the ones who facilitate language and content learning. They are the ones who can help students to find their voices. So, then, how do we promote liberation through education for English learner students? Ensure that they are placed in a setting that best meets their needs.

It must be noted here that I have purposefully chosen to use the term "educator" rather than teacher because of the wider range of respondents to my survey and interviews than originally expected. Initially I was going to filter out the responses of those who were not "teachers" in the traditional sense of the term, but as the project went on, it became clear that there are other major players in the English learner identification and placement process that I had not expected. Therefore, this study will include the voices of guidance counselors, a school adjustment counselor, an ISP (instructional support personnel), and a school adjustment counselor in addition to the "teachers" who responded to the survey and participated in the interviews.

For this particular study, teacher knowledge of and attitude toward identification and placement were studied in depth in order to explore why the process does not lead to the intended outcome and what factors may play into that. For this work, the focus was on educator knowledge and attitude.

Background and Context

At the point of registration, most districts collect information on a student's language background through the administration of a "home language survey" (Ragan & Lesaux, 2006). The home language survey document is most often a part of a "packet" of paperwork (either digital or an actual packet) that a registering family must fill out. Based on the presence of a language other than English in the home or child's environment, as indicated by the parent/guardian on the home language survey, an assessment is given to determine the child's English language proficiency. In my experiences in both urban and suburban districts, this assessment can be done at the point of registration or at a later time. According to policy, the assessment used to identify a student as needing English support and being labeled as an

English learner must measure the child's ability in English in all four domains of language: reading, writing, listening and speaking (Lhamon & Gupta, 2015; Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education [DESE], 2016). Assessment in all domains ensures that a student is identified as an English learner even if he/she appears to be proficient in, for example, speaking, but needs more language instruction in writing. Depending on the district, many of these steps are completed either in the child's assigned school or a central location (often called a "Welcome Center" or "Newcomer Center"). When this practice happens at a central location, it means that educators have more distance (both literally and figuratively) from the process of identification and placement.

Though this practice of identifying English learners at the point of registration has been commonplace for some years, many school districts have been found to be out of compliance with policy in various ways, including not having a process in place for *all* students, having an inadequate home language survey, and not having the home language survey process trigger assessment in all four domains (Bailey & Kelly, 2012; Goldenberg & Quach, 2010; Lhamon & Gupta, 2015). Some districts assess students (especially young pre-literate students) in listening and speaking only, and this is due largely in part to the assessments that are available for early childhood students (Lhamon & Gupta, 2015; Ragan & Lesaux, 2006). However, as noted above, assessment of English proficiency must include all four domains of language (reading, writing, listening and speaking). This is a federal standard set by case law. The local major urban center was found to be out of compliance with initial testing procedures in 2010 and major changes in the process occurred as a result in both the city affected and the state as a whole (U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights [OCR], 2015). As a direct result of the Department of Justice becoming involved

in enforcing compliance, this large district had to implement several reforms including increasing the number of EL certified teachers and extending the opportunity for an SEI (Sheltered English Immersion) endorsement to many educators.

Most EL students in Massachusetts receive two types of instruction: Sheltered Content Instruction (also called Sheltered English Immersion [SEI]) and English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction (DESE, 2013). These two types of instruction stem from the English-only policy in Massachusetts that was only recently overturned. This first type of instruction, SEI instruction, includes "approaches, strategies, and methodology to make the content of lessons more comprehensible and to promote the development of academic language needed to successfully master content standards" (DESE, 2013, pp. 12–13). In low incidence districts (districts with less than 100 English learners), EL students are almost always placed into mainstream (regular) classes for content area instruction. In the past few years, an SEI professional development course called RETELL (Rethinking Equity in the Teaching of English Language Learners) has been designed and implemented to help "core academic teachers" (Math, Science, English, and Social Studies teachers—along with reading specialists and special education teachers) develop their teaching strategies repertoire for English Language Learners and become true SEI teachers (DESE, 2013). The course is a path to the endorsement mentioned in the previous paragraph. RETELL was created in response to the aforementioned civil rights violations that prompted the OCR/DOJ to intervene (Lhamon & Gupta, 2015; U.S. Department of Education, OCR, 2015). The second type of instruction, English as a Second Language (ESL), on the other hand, is the "systematic, explicit, and sustained language instruction" that "prepares students for general education by focusing on academic language" (DESE, 2019a, p. 4). This instruction must be

provided by a licensed English as a Second language (ESL) or English [Language] learner teacher (ELL/EL).

Theoretical Underpinnings

To gain a deeper understanding of the problem of practice and the existing literature, I interrogated the bodies of literature related to the topic and then created a research design based on the research questions mentioned above using a framework constructed from critical pedagogy, critical constructivism, and intersectionality, all of which fall under the larger umbrella of critical theory. Critical theory, which brings light to the power that dominant cultures have over oppressed groups, fits this problem of practice well because school registration is not an isolated process; the structures in place are situated within the larger structures of society. Though the word oppressed is admittedly strong, the term will be used in this paper to explain social conditions. As Collins and Bilge (2016) so eloquently state, "The word 'oppression' may be out of favor, but the social conditions that it describes are not" (p. 161). Due to the complex nature of the factors surrounding the implementation of English learner identification policies, using critical theory, with an emphasis on critical pedagogy, critical constructivism, and intersectionality, as a theoretical framework allowed me to both highlight the varied outcomes of the school registration processes and lift important themes from the literature on the history of English learner registration and the essential components of school registration for students who have been exposed to a language other than English. The theoretical framework that was created as a result of this study, called critical organizational praxis, will be explored at length in Chapter 2.

Significance of the Study

This problem of practice, the need for a student to be placed correctly, is important because it affects the student first and foremost. A student's access to English language instruction is a civil right that is protected by federal and state law (Lhamon & Gupta, 2015). Protecting the civil rights of students, especially students who are facing the challenge of learning English, is an urgent matter because the English learner population is a significant percentage (9%) of our student population in the United States and in the state of Massachusetts (DESE, 2017b; U.S. Department of Education, NCES, 2016). The existing data on the EL population in the state and country also highlight important intersections that will be explored in this study—these intersections include income level, cognitive ability, socioeconomic status, gender, race/ethnicity, etc.

If, for example, a child with a background in a language other than or in addition to English is receiving special education services but not direct and explicit English language instruction, he or she may not make effective progress. Under-identification of English learners affects families as well, as the student is not receiving the support he/she needs and the family may need to navigate different political and cultural systems in order to advocate for their child (Bourdieu, 1986; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Noguera, 2004). Unfortunately (and, I believe, unfairly), teachers' and schools' rankings suffer because a student's level of English language proficiency, by definition, will affect his/her ability to learn in a classroom where the language of instruction is English and his/her performance affects achievement scores (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015). Achievement, as traditionally measured by testing, is difficult to define for English learners because if they were able to achieve at the same level in English as their native English-speaking peers, then their categorization as

English learner would be incorrect (Rossell, 2005). All of these are nested within the greater societal impact that is created by the possibility of English learner students not being able to thrive within society due to their language proficiency (Duff, 2014). In stressing the importance of learning English, however, it should be noted that I believe wholeheartedly that students' first languages should be valued (and utilized). In acknowledging the tension between teaching the language of power and maintaining students' first languages (dialects, etc.), Freire (2005) sets the following as guidelines. Students learning the dominant language should know that:

- their language is as rich and beautiful as the educated norm and that therefore they do not have to be ashamed of the way they talk;
    - even so, it is fundamental that they learn the standard syntax and intonation so that

      a. they diminish the disadvantages in their struggle to live their lives;

      b. they gain a fundamental tool for the fight they must wage against the injustice and discrimination targeted at them. (Freire, 2005, p. 132)

School registration is a pivotal moment in the educational process—it is a process of gatekeeping that controls who has access to English language education services. The United States has a history of gatekeeping practices, such as the registration processes at Ellis Island or even tracking students by ability, that can help one to understand how today's phenomenon of school registration is situated in history and is not new or even unique (Lange, 2015; Noguera, 2004). Therefore, the policies and practices of school registration

must be examined more closely in order to better understand the factors that are leading to the under- and over- identification of English learners at the point of registration.

Summary

Based on the problem of practice (students needing to be placed correctly), the lack of authentic praxis in the implementation of English learner identification processes, and the idea of critical organizational praxis, it became clear that there were two bodies of literature to explore in depth. The first body of literature was that which pertains to the laws and policies that govern English learner identification, placement, and related programming. Though it may seem quite straightforward to examine current policy at the federal, state, and local level, it was important to trace the evolution of these policies and determine how historical events in the United States intersect with these policies. Though these policies and their intended outcomes can be viewed as neutral, they are (re)created and implemented by stakeholders who are acting within a social context. Therefore, they can be examined through a lens of critical theory in order to understand how language policy can lead to liberation or oppression. Second, it was essential to examine the body of literature that illuminates the tools and procedures that are utilized during the process of identifying ELs. The home language survey (HLS) and initial assessment are the two most common tools of the language-related paperwork that registering families fill out at the point of registration. The results of the HLS trigger the initial assessment: an assessment of students who may have another language influencing their English development. This will be explored in depth in Chapter 2. Because so many variables affect any type of assessment (cultural background, fatigue, environment, etc.), these assessments must be examined carefully as the results of the assessment have lasting impacts on students and the educators who are working diligently

to meet their needs. Both of these bodies of literature, viewed through the aforementioned theoretical framework of critical organizational praxis, then informed the research design for this dissertation study.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to understand the issues surrounding identification and placement in the initial English Learner identification process, the answers to the following questions were sought:

1. What does the literature reveal about the historical and present-day laws and policies that govern the process of English learner identification?
2. What are the tools and procedures associated with the process of English learner identification and what does the literature indicate about them?

The two bodies of literature that answer these questions provide a comprehensive view of the integral components of the initial identification process for ELs. These bodies of literature, however, reveal a major gap in what has been studied about the process of English learner identification. The literature is silent when it comes to knowledge and attitude of educators on outcomes of English learner identification and placement. Out of this silence came the opportunity to study this phenomenon in the literature and later in my research study through the lens of my theoretical framework, which is a coming together of critical pedagogy, critical constructivism, and intersectionality that I have termed "critical organizational praxis."

Definitions of Important Terms

For the purposes of this paper, the term English learner will be used to describe students who have been identified in state and federal data as English Learners. This group is also called English Language Learners (ELLs), English as a Second Language (ESL) students, and sometimes LEP (Limited English Proficient), though these terms are no longer used due to the updated federal legislation (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015). Similarly, a student who has been reclassified (and no longer is considered in these data to be an EL and does not receive English language support) was for many years called "Formerly Limited English Proficient" (FLEP) and instead is now referred to as a "Former English Learner" (FEL). As this terminology has only recently changed, ELL and FLEP is still prominent in much of the literature and policy on English learners. The purpose of this change was to no longer use the term "limited" when referring to students who are in the process of acquiring language because the term was treating a student's background in a language other than English as a deficit rather than an asset (Hakuta & Pecheone, 2016).

Another term that must be defined is ESL (English as a Second Language). Though this term has at times not been very popular, it remains the name of the subject that English Learners are taught. This is likely due to the fact that, in the United States, the academic subject that studies language and literature is called "English," and this subject is different from the content that is taught to students who are working on English language *acquisition* and are categorized as ELs. Thus, ESL is the content that ELs are taught when they are receiving specific instruction in English language acquisition. In defining the term ESL, however, it is imperative to acknowledge the fact that many students are not learning English

as a *second* language, but rather as a third, fourth, or even fifth language. Nevertheless, the term has persisted in policy and literature and will therefore be used in this study.

This paper will also refer to students who have individualized education plans (IEPs) as "Students with Disabilities" (SWD) which is the term used in policy. This sub-group of students encounters greater difficulty with the process of testing for English proficiency and so gathering data about this particular intersection was an important part of my review of the literature and subsequent research design. Some of the literature also includes the term "special needs," especially when referring to students who may require specialized services, though this term is not preferred in policy and in the literature. English learner students who have disabilities are often referred to as ELL/SWD or EL/SWD.

Theoretical Framework: Critical Organizational Praxis

Before being introduced to the two major bodies of literature pertaining to the topic, it is important for one to understand the theoretical underpinnings of this research project. The theories of critical pedagogy, critical constructivism, and intersectionality are explored at length below. Combined, these theories highlight many of the important factors that play into the varied outcomes of the school registration and English learner identification process.

Critical Pedagogy

Critical pedagogy is the method and practice of education for liberation through teaching students to strive toward the "emergence of consciousness and critical intervention in reality" (Freire, 1970/2000, p. 81). In his native Brazil, Paulo Freire, a leading figure in critical pedagogy, was seen as dangerous because his methods led to the voiceless finding their voices. These students then could question the status quo of power and oppression of those who have "less" (Crotty, 2015). As he lived out his theoretical stance and his Catholic

faith, he proved that liberating oppressed people is truly a counter-cultural endeavor. Though Freire's work is often viewed as merely pedagogical, his ideals extended beyond classroom praxis and into organizational and administrative praxis (Kress, 2018). In the case of school registration and identification of English learners, liberation as it relates to critical pedagogy is a helpful lens for examining the literature as it can highlight the factors that contribute to defining who has "less" (in this case, less of the English language). Instead of focusing on oppression and the status quo, however, I want to examine how the literature points to opportunities for liberation.

Critical pedagogy asserts that liberation can be brought to fruition by dialogue and by critical consciousness (Afuape, 2016; Freire, 1970/2000). Often, current structures and practices in education suppress the type of learning that would allow students and their families to achieve liberation (Kress, 2015). When education seeks to uncover dominance and help the oppressed to gain a voice, all parties (educators, students, districts, etc.) become more fully human. This liberation through a critical stance allows the oppressed to not only be liberated, but to then work to liberate others as well (Teemant, 2014). Initial studies on the use of critical stance in schools also indicate that critical stance improves achievement. For this reason, critical stance has been incorporated into the "Six Standards for Effective Pedagogy" (formerly, the "Five Standards for Effective Pedagogy"; Teemant, 2015) which is a highly esteemed teacher training and professional development curriculum.

Some scholars link critical pedagogy with the concept of love and choosing the interests of the other above one's own (Freire, 1970/2000; hooks, 1989). In the field of second language acquisition, love is often presented as a powerful motivator for language learning. Love can help someone to move past his or her own ethnocentric assumptions

(hooks, 2014). Therefore, love can be a way to bring people groups together—to increase mutual understanding—and can simultaneously be a subversive force for liberative action. Viewing the literature through this lens is another way of humanizing the research, especially the research on assessment, which is often quantitative and impersonal.

Placing such value on liberation is not unique to critical pedagogy. A related movement was the liberation theology movement of the 1970s in Central and South America. As one whose worldview is informed by my faith, I could not help but interrogate the literature from this lens as well. As a college student, I was encouraged to articulate my worldview and then find a vocation that suits that worldview. In part, that is how I became an ESL teacher and why I have sought this terminal degree. As I read through different theoretical texts, I was pleased to find a paradigm that closely matches my worldview. Critical pedagogy (with an emphasis on liberation), complemented by intersectionality, has come the closest. Liberation theology maintains that the ultimate goal for humanity is liberation (Gutiérrez, 1988), and I am determined that my life's work be characterized by advancing liberation for others.

Based on the concepts of liberation as presented above, critical pedagogy can be used to question the literature as to how English learner identification and placement might be a force of liberation that empowers newcomer students and their families. Studying the process through critical pedagogy can promote liberation for English learners and their families by highlighting what is just and what can actually be done to change the world (Lather, 2006).

Critical Constructivism

Constructivism is the idea that there are no neutral perspectives, spaces, or experiences, but rather everything is situated within a socio-cultural context that colors our

perspective on the world, ourselves, and others (Kincheloe, 2005). Critical constructivism extends the concept to include one's critical consciousness and awareness that they themselves come from a background situated in a socio-cultural context (Kincheloe, 2005). When thinking about education from a critical constructivist paradigm, one must acknowledge that knowledge *is* constructed and, therefore, must also closely examine *how* knowledge is constructed (Bentley et al., 2007). Through this examination, though, one must always be locating himself or herself in the research and acknowledging his/her positionality due to environment, history, etc. all while leading his/her students to do the same (Kincheloe, 2005; Kincheloe et al., 2011).

To bring about critical consciousness in themselves and their students (or research), critical constructivists often employ a form of bricolage. In qualitative inquiry, bricolage is the coming together of various practices and theories—and critical theorists can benefit greatly from gathering ideas and methodologies from various disciplines (Kincheloe et al., 2011; Rogers, 2012). If everything is constructed and is related to power differentials, as critical constructivism maintains, then addressing these issues of power must be more important than fidelity to any one belief or method (Kincheloe, 2005; Kincheloe et al., 2011). In addressing social issues, critical constructivists can and should examine the roles that race, gender, class, and other demographic categories play in keeping power in the hands of the elite. This examination of demographic groups and compounded marginalization leads naturally to the theory of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989), which is explored below.

Intersectionality

Interpreting the literature and the problem of practice through the lens of intersectionality allows one to see the connection that language policy and practice has to the

greater forces of oppression and dominance that exist whenever a language such as English is tied to the group in power. Intersectionality, a term coined in 1989 by lawyer and scholar-activist Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), refers to the idea that marginalization is multiplied when a person falls into multiple marginalized groups. In other words, those who are "multiply-burdened" experience marginalization to a degree that is greater than the sum of its parts (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991). Though Crenshaw originally applied this theory to the legal cases of women of color (thus addressing the intersection of gender and race), the theory is now commonly used to look at other intersections as well (Collins & Bilge, 2016). Both my study and the literature illuminate the intersections of language and culture, while also addressing dimensions of gender, socioeconomic status (SES), gender, age, race, etc.

Linguoracism (Macedo et al., 2015) and the raciolingistic perspective (Rosa & Flores, 2017) two related sub-theories linked to critical theory and intersectionality which critical theory points out that individuals and society are linked in this same way (Crotty, 2015). According to critical scholars Kincheloe and McLaren (2002), "language is central to the formation of subjectivity (conscious and unconscious awareness)" (p. 105). In practice, even when a student becomes proficient in English as a result of his or her education in the United States, he or she will still be seen as "other" by the dominant society (Macedo et al., 2015). Though much of the discourse on "English only" instruction movements is centered on language, the reality is that these movements are intolerant of more than just a person's proficiency in English. Linguoracism is an expansion of the concept of linguicism, which is the idea that differences in language are a source of inequality between linguistic groups that lead to an unequal distribution of power and resources (Skutnabb-Kangas, 1988).

I firmly believe that the varied experiences with school registration and English learner identification are the result of several intersecting factors, not just race and language (though both do play a role). Therefore, I chose to interrogate the literature through the lens of intersectionality, while still maintaining a focus on language. Students who have been exposed to a language other than English at home fall into other categories of identity as well (such as gender, ability, etc.) and, thus, looking at issues of intersectionality in addition to just language is important to consider when looking at the phenomenon of English learner identification and placement. Intersectionality and critical education pair well together and can help to inform each other. When explaining the relationship between intersectionality and critical education, Collins and Bilge (2016) said,

> Critical education has long been important for intersectionality. Across classroom settings, religious communities, mass media venues, village schools, living rooms, or street corners, education has the potential to oppress or liberate. In this context, the emancipatory potential of education is far reaching. (p. 159)

The theory of intersectionality allows one to look beyond just language when examining the intersecting factors that are at play with my problem of practice (Collins & Bilge, 2016; L. Taylor, 2006).

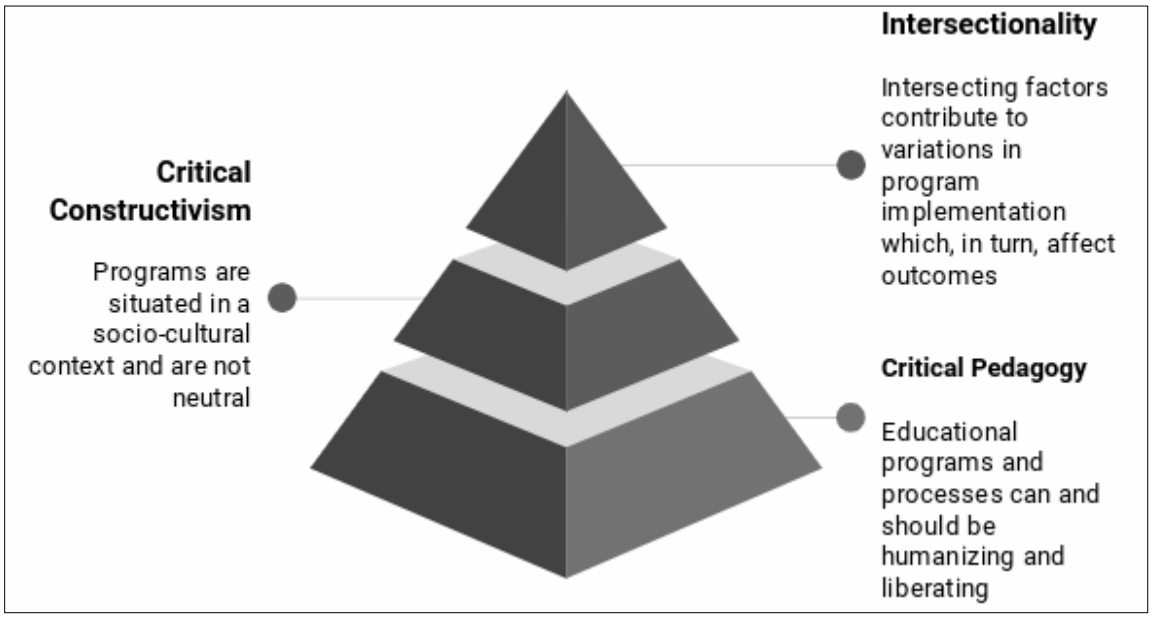
Toward a New Theory of Critical Organizational Praxis

Though each of these theories contribute on their own to an understanding of the problem of practice, all three, when working together, are able to illuminate this study and findings in a way that each would not be able to do on its own. For this reason, I propose a theoretical framework called "Critical Organizational Praxis." Though Freire's work on critical pedagogy is most often applied to teaching and learning (thus the term pedagogy),

this same idea can be applied to administrative practices such as the identification of English learners. I maintain that just as teaching can be a means of liberation or oppression, so too can identification and placement be. When identification leads to the intended outcome, a student is placed in a setting that humanizes and liberates him or her. This theoretical framework guided my analysis of existing literature and ultimately my research design and analysis.

Figure 1

Proposed Theoretical Framework of Critical Organizational Praxis



Laws and Policies

In both the historical and present context, the term registration is associated with a number of different practices that can carry different implications. On one hand, registration can be associated with signing up for something—sports, conventions, and contests. On the

other hand, registration can be the means of tracking someone or something—as in the case of Ellis Island, Jewish people in Nazi Germany, and the post 9/11 "special registration" program in the United States for immigrants from certain countries. Just as registration can be associated with both good and bad practices, assessment, especially assessment of adults and children who are "different" in any way has a checkered past. Assessment can be used as a form of oppression and selection, as in the eugenics movement (Stoskopf, 2002). Assessment can also be a tool for identifying supports for students in school (though receiving supports that are not needed are as much of a civil rights violation as withholding needed supports). Assessment will be more fully explored through the lens of critical organizational praxis later in this chapter, as lifting the themes of oppression and liberation, as well as adherence to stated goal, are important factors in understanding how initial identification assessment at the point of registration affects proper placement for ELs. Though there are historical accounts of "tracking" programs, there is virtually no research about school registration as a practice and the role that initial identification assessments play in student placement. For that reason, this section of the literature review will examine historical English Learner Education programs and processes in order to better explore the current registration and English learner identification practices in my study.

Tracing the History of Policy

The written policies governing the present-day education of English learners trace back directly to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. The guiding beliefs and attitudes about the teaching and learning of English in the United States, however, were formed long before 1965. The teaching of English has been a contentious issue in the United States of America since colonial times and various researchers and others have traced the

evolution of the issue and have linked it to various causes (Cavanaugh, 1996; De Jong, 2011; Harper, 2011; Ricento, 2006). De Jong (2011) argues that the pedagogies of English language education in the late 18th and early 19th century are the foundation for the formulation of policies that now affect our public schools.

The aforementioned waves of instructional trends in the 18th and 19th centuries correlate loosely with periods of increased and decreased immigration rates and also times of conflict within the United States (Cavanaugh, 1996). One such time of conflict coincided with a hegemonic nationalist wave called the Americanization movement. The precipitating conflict was World War I, which ushered in both a time of reactionary nationalism in the United States and a time of increased immigration (Cavanaugh, 1996). During this time, new immigrants were from increasingly diverse backgrounds and were perceived to be unable to adjust to life in the United States in the same manner as previous waves of immigrants (Cavanaugh, 1996; Tyack, 1974). English had previously been used as a force of colonialism and repression and the Americanization movement shifted the focus of English instruction toward assimilation. It should be noted that though present-day policies govern the public education of school-age children, the history of teaching English includes teaching adults (and working older children) because the focus of English instruction was on teaching the workforce. The Americanization movement set out to provide classes in the subjects of English (language) and citizenship (culture) to immigrant adults (Ray, 2013; Tyack, 1974; Yocum, 1919). Though some immigrants were involved in promoting the value of the Americanization movement (Hanley, 2012), Americanization was, for the most part, a force of dominance and linguoracism from mainly white monolingual speakers of English. Of course, English instruction existed both before and after the Americanization movement, but

the Americanization movement is a helpful reference point when thinking about how nationalism can be a force of oppression for those who are not yet proficient in English. In the decades following the height of the Americanization movement, legislators began to see that students needed more than just instruction in English to succeed.

In the time since the Americanization movement, there have clearly been great strides in supporting English learners and promoting humanization. Teaching language and culture continue to be a major goal of organizations that assist in welcoming newcomers to the United States. The two landmark cases that have catalyzed this progress are *Lau v. Nichols* (1974) and *Castañeda v. Pickard* (1981). *Lau v. Nichols* upheld the Civil Rights Act of 1964 by ruling that students must be given instruction that leads to English proficiency in order for them to access the education that they have a right to (Harper, 2011, *Lau v. Nichols*, 1974). Similarly, Castañeda v. Pickard was a case that determined that there needed to be a mandated way to measure the effectiveness of the language instruction required by Lau v. Nichols (*Castañeda v. Pickard*, 1981; Harper, 2011; *Lau v. Nichols*, 1974). The mandated way of measuring the effectiveness is a three-pronged approach that is still used today in the evaluation of EL programs. In short, programs must (1) follow sound educational theory, (2) be implemented effectively, and (3) have measurable (effective) outcomes that are monitored (*Castañeda v. Pickard*, 1981; DESE, 2016; Harper, 2011; Lhamon & Gupta, 2015). Despite the progress that has occurred in the time since these cases were tried and decided, language policy in some states (including, up until recently, Massachusetts) continues to block research-based methods (DESE, 2016; Slama et al., 2015).[1]

[1]A 2018 law called the LOOK bill reversed the blocking of research-based methods of instruction in Massachusetts.

Current Policy and Pedagogical Context

In recent history, one might say that a resurgence of "Americanization" has occurred in educational policy and the culture as a whole. Policies such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB), although not directly aimed at exclusionary practices for English learners, made it impossible for ELs to achieve based on the accountability measures created by the policy (Gándara & Rumberger, 2009; NCLB, 2002). Due to the increased focus on testing from NCLB and ESSA, curriculum in general has been narrowed and English learners, especially students with limited or interrupted schooling, are falling even further behind (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015; Gándara & Rumberger, 2009; NCLB, 2002; Rossell, 2005). In other words, the current educational structures are not even allowing English learners to have the option of being "college and career ready" as required by the new Common Core State Standards (CCSS; Coleman & Goldenberg, 2012).

It is important to note that the nation has already come a long way regarding meeting the needs of English learners. As previously mentioned, English learners are defined as a group by their inability to perform in English at the same level as their peers. Before ESSA came into effect in 2015, students in public schools were supposed to be at 100% proficiency on standardized assessments by 2013-2014 as required by the NCLB legislation (NCLB, 2002). The CCSS, though it does have high standards for English learners, is not nearly as impossible for students to meet, as the NCLB requirement was (NCLB, 2002; Rossell, 2005). Because EL programs have their own standards (either from a consortium like WIDA [World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment] or from the state education department), the question of how EL standards and the CCSS (or other state standards) will interact remains to be answered. Currently, English Language Proficiency (ELP) standards and other

content standards relate in one of two ways: either the ELP standards align with each content area specifically or are broad multidisciplinary standards (Lee, 2018). Regardless of what ELP standards exist, English learners must accomplish the task of learning language and content simultaneously when in an English-only school environment, which is a difficult task as compared to native English speakers' schooling. Because states have different standards for learning English than for regular curriculum, EL students and teachers of ELs are dually burdened with the task of learning and teaching two sets of standards. ESSA requires that English language proficiency (ELP) standards align with content standards, and so this creates the unique challenge of trying to integrate two sets of standards with very different goals (Lee, 2018). Lee (2018) explains this unique dilemma by saying,

> there are underlying issues with content standards and ELP standards, which present both opportunities and challenges for alignment. Content areas are contending with convergences and discrepancies in disciplinary practices, while EL education is contending with the absence of an agreed-on framework for ELP standards. Moreover, there has been a lack of substantive communication and collaboration between EL education and content areas...In the era of alignment, the tradition of working in silos is no longer viable. (p. 540).

Though WIDA is generally regarded as a helpful tool, there are some criticisms that must be taken into consideration. Teemant (2018) shares the following analysis of WIDA, saying, "While WIDA's framework includes mention of sociocultural context and content area learning, it privileges language (standards, proficiency levels, domains, features of academic language, performance indicators) over learning or learners" (n.p.). Education for liberation cannot happen without privileging the student over the content.

In order to meet the goals of the Common Core State Standards, many school districts are scrambling to find a way to narrow the gap between native English speakers and their English learner peers. Some districts have tried increasing the amount of time that students receive direct English instruction, but instead of this helping students, it is taking time away from valuable content learning in subjects such as Math, Science, and Social Studies (Gándara & Rumberger, 2009). Suggested strategies for meeting these content and language needs include instructional strategies such as increasing oral proficiency through verbal interactions and using primary language for support (Coleman & Goldenberg, 2012). Some scholars suggest that an extended school day is the answer to this dilemma—students are then able to receive increased instructional time in the English language, while still having time left to access grade level content (Gándara & Rumberger, 2009; Johnson, 2019). Increasing the length of the school day, even for a small group of students, could be a financial burden for many districts and might limit the opportunities for extracurricular activities for English learners. Equal opportunity for participation in extracurricular activities is required by both federal and state policy and is monitored regularly in compliance reviews and program evaluation procedures (*Castañeda v. Pickard*, 1981; DESE, 2016; Lhamon & Gupta, 2015).

Meeting the needs of *all* students continues to be a challenge for schools in the United States. According to the U.S. Department of Justice, EL students should have "equal access to a high-quality education and the opportunity to achieve their full academic potential" (Lhamon & Gupta, 2015, p. 1). Students should have high expectations set for them, regardless of their language or disability, as high-quality teaching and personal relationship building are two ways to reach *all* students in one's classroom (Blazar & Archer, 2020;

Saphier et al., 2008). Despite the efforts of the U.S. DOJ and the OCR, English Language Learner students are still lagging behind in standardized testing scores, especially the growing subgroup of students who have limited or interrupted education (U.S. DOJ, 2015). Below, English learner subgroups will be explored in more depth in order to understand the need for policy that is not one-size-fits-all.

English Learner Subgroups

Though all English learners are categorized similarly in state and federal data, it is important to understand the different subgroups of English learners that exist in U.S. schools. There are many subgroups identified by scholars, but this section will focus on three overlapping categories: students with limited or interrupted formal education, refugee students, and newcomer students. Students with limited or interrupted formal education (called SLIFE) are held to the same standards as their native English-speaking peers, despite stark differences in levels of educational attainment due to missing school or poor-quality schooling (Short & Boyson, 2012). These students have different schooling needs than other ELs because of their lack of exposure to the concepts and skills learned in schools (DeCapua & Marshall, 2015).

In order to address these and other needs, many of these students are placed into so-called newcomer programs that provide intensive instruction in both language and content (Short & Boyson, 2012). As with any programs, newcomer programs are offered where there is a need—and therefore SLIFE in low-incidence districts (districts with small numbers of EL students—usually less than 100) are placed together with "regular" EL students. According to DeCapua & Marshall (2009; 2015), SLIFE need specially trained educators and administrators who will provide the specialized instruction to close gaps in content

knowledge, as well as address English learning needs. SLIFE also benefit greatly from personal relationship building. Building personal relationships with students, especially students with limited or interrupted schooling is a vital part of promoting academic achievement (Blazar & Archer, 2020; H. W. Marshall & DeCapua, 2013; Saphier et al., 2008). Building personal relationships helps to break down cultural barriers and allows for the educator to practice Freirean methods (Gill & Niens, 2014). Many cultures are considered to be collectivist societies, meaning that they function through relationships, whereas the culture in the United States is individualistic (Hatch & Cunliffe, 2013). This difference can make adjusting to learning environments in the United States difficult for some newcomer students and therefore makes it more difficult for students to learn English and content. Fostering personal relationships with students helps students to learn in a way that is culturally relevant to them (H. W. Marshall & DeCapua, 2013). Instruction almost always reflects cultural priorities, even when the teacher is not aware of it. For example, instruction in U.S. schools values descriptive categorization and definition (asking "what is") and is highly text dependent (H. W. Marshall & DeCapua, 2013). This stands in contrast with many cultures which value functional categorization and a tradition of oracy (H. W. Marshall & DeCapua, 2013). It is suggested that educators of SLIFE explicitly teach the cultural priorities of the United States so that their students have more opportunities to succeed in mainstream classrooms (H. W. Marshall & DeCapua, 2013). Simultaneously, though, SLIFE should be taught with regard to their cultural priorities as to not force assimilation and promote liberation rather than oppression. As Collins and Bilge (2016) explain in their book on intersectionality, "Formal schooling thus constitutes an important venue for teaching students both to fit in and criticize existing social hierarchies" (p. 165). This is the challenge

of meeting the needs of all students: teaching in a liberatory manner while still also helping students to find a place to belong.

Programs designed for newcomers and/or SLIFE are monitored closely because of the potential for civil rights violations such as not giving students the same opportunities as their peers (DESE, 2016; Lhamon & Gupta, 2015). As has been discovered time and again in the United States, separate is not equal. Just as in special education, there is a fine balance between giving students what they need and ensuring inclusion whenever possible. In one study of high school course-taking, it was found that there was a significant difference between ELs as a whole and their never-EL peers when it comes to accessing math, science, and social science courses (Johnson, 2019). Johnson's (2019) findings show that these differences are attributed to "differences in academic preparation prior to high school" (p. 475). So, then, it is the job of newcomer programs (and any ELE programs) to help students gain the opportunity to have equal access to courses and to also ensure that students are given ample opportunity for "academic preparation" if they have arrived prior to high school. Newcomer programs most often provide a unique advantage to newly arrived immigrants because they are given the chance to learn in a program that is specifically designed to meet their social and academic needs (Short & Boyson, 2012). Newcomer programs are most often found in districts where there are larger numbers of English learners. These programs give access to a wide range of curriculum for English learners, while still adjusting language use for students to be able to understand the content.

One alternative to longer school days and newcomer programs that students can access is after school programs. After school programs are an essential means of addressing the fact that English learner students have an increased risk for academic difficulties

(Greenberg, 2013; McBrien, 2005). In a presentation of correlational quantitative research, Greenberg (2013) asserts that students who attend after school programs do have increased academic achievement. The variables examined by Greenberg (2013) are important correlational indicators such as mother's marital status, maternal education, household income, etc. The selection of these indicators is a strength of this study, as it is helpful to look at more than just student achievement and attendance at a program when trying to determine what policies and/or practices will best meet the need of racial, ethnic, and linguistic minority students. As in my own study, examining intersections is vital to interpreting findings.

Although many after school programs do not specifically target English learner students, federal Title III funds can be used by school districts in order to supplement (but not supplant) English Language instruction. This highly formulaic grant, funded by federal money allocated by the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (now the Every Student Succeeds Act), does allow districts to provide programming that supplements but not supplants programming for the high-risk population of English learners in districts or consortia with 100 or more ELs (DESE, 2016; U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Changes in policy have shifted accountability measures for English learners, but Title III continues to provide the same type of funding that it did previously and is a major funding source for many EL programs across the United States (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

Refugee students are a subgroup of immigrant students that have many of the same needs as English learners. Some, but not all, refugee students are categorized as English learners. Others, due to their high level of English proficiency (whether acquired before

arriving in the United States or since arrival), do not require support in their language development. In an extensive meta-analysis of the current literature on refugee students, McBrien (2005) cites the most important needs of refugee students to be psychosocial well-being and language acquisition. Psychosocial well-being and language acquisition both require knowledge (and knowledge production). Knowledge is often stratified due to socioeconomic factors and immigrants are often situated in environments where they lack access to the knowledge that other students may be able to access more easily (Anyon, 1981). In order to help students gain access to that knowledge (sometimes referred to as cultural capital), educators and administrators must check their biases and do their best to understand the immigrant experience (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; McBrien, 2005). In addition, educators of English learners must not view students as "blank slates" but rather they should build on the background knowledge that the students have from their life experience (both educational and non-educational in the traditional sense of the word; Calderón et al., 2011; González et al., 2006). Viewed through the lens of liberation, teaching language and culture needs to be very carefully navigated in order to ensure that the methods and practices being used are not causing further oppression. Educators should place great value on the wealth of knowledge and experience that immigrants bring with them when they arrive in the United States. McBrien's (2005) suggestion of psychosocial well-being and language acquisition roughly match up with the English and citizenship classes of the Americanization movement, but merely teaching English and citizenship fall short of McBrien's goals.

Connecting the Past and Present Policy Contexts

The cultural context in which this study was written mirrors the anti-immigrant sentiments of the past as there has been an increase in the unabashed vocalization of white

supremacy and anti-immigrant sentiment. In the United States today, social justice minded educators of immigrants live in the tension of wanting to promote cultural and linguistic adjustment without stripping immigrant groups of their culture and language. I argue that this tension can be alleviated through liberatory education and critically examining pedagogy and programming. Educators can use methods such as culturally responsive teaching (Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995) and culturally sustaining pedagogies (Paris, 2012) and to simultaneously battle racism and empower students to maintain their cultural identities (Lerner, 2012). This type of instruction can be a force of liberation for English learner students and families, though education is not currently and has not been a panacea for integration of new people groups (Olneck, 2007).

Truly, the history of English instruction is what has shaped the policies in place today. Because we are a diverse society (a so-called "nation of immigrants"), there is linguistic diversity within the United States. This diversity is complicated by the fact that English is a powerful language, but yet it is not the official language of the country (Macedo et al., 2015). Teachers of English learners are constantly searching for the answer to the questions of how to best teach those who do not yet have native-like proficiency in English and what materials and methods will work best (Cavanaugh, 1996). In looking at past and present practices and programs, it is evident that students need to be properly identified as English learners in order to receive the specialized instruction in the English language that they require to succeed.

Though some may view identification as a label that is limiting for students, the literature clearly shows that being identified as an English learner does in fact improve outcomes for students (Ross et al., 2012; Shin, 2018); and so proper identification is possible

and, more importantly, beneficial. In a quantitative longitudinal study of students just above and just below the cut-off score for identification, Shin (2018) found that identification as an EL shows a statistically significant effect on academic outcomes. Using a regression discontinuity design, Shin looked at the students' initial scores on the California English Language Development test and then later examined these scores against students' achievement on the California English Language Arts test. Students who were identified as English Learners did better on the English Language Arts test (Shin, 2018). This finding suggests that even if students are taken out of some of their regular academic classes in order to have ESL class (which is a popular but controversial model of instruction), the benefit of instruction in English outweighs the loss of regular class time. Proper identification is essential to meeting the needs of English Learners in the United States. As a direct result of registration and subsequent identification assessment, students who do not end up identified as English learners will not receive the services that could be available to them (whether the available services are language support, newcomer programs, SLIFE programs, etc.).

The lack of information about English learner identification and placement stands out as a gap in the literature. It is only in the very recent past that we have records of how students become identified as English learners, which will be further discussed in the next section. This begs the question: How were English learners identified in the past and what was the lived experience of children and families going through the identification process? This question is further complicated by the lack of prior research on registration processes for students coming from different backgrounds, especially that of ELs with disabilities. Illuminating these gaps in the literature can lead to the humanization of English learners and their families. The next section of this review of the literature will examine the tools and

procedures associated with the school registration process for families who speak a language other than or in addition to English.

English Learner Identification Tools and Procedures

The two main tools (and related procedures) used in the English learner identification process are the home language survey and a language proficiency assessment. The specific instruments vary by state and district, but the overall process is somewhat standardized. As described in Chapter 1, the process of school registration most often consists of parents and/or guardians going to the registration site (either at the school or a central location such as a newcomer center or parent information center) to obtain and fill out registration paperwork. School registration happens each time a child moves to a new school district, whether in state or out of state. For students who move within a state, information about the student's background is usually much more easily accessible and transferable because of NCLB's requirement for student information systems (NCLB, 2002). If a child is starting a new district but staying in the state of Massachusetts, language proficiency data including prior standardized testing can be easily transferred from a prior district (DESE, 2016). However, if the child is moving from out of state, is new to the country, or does not have complete prior schooling records, a district must gather new information while also attempting to locate any relevant school records. If a student qualifies as an English Learner, he/she will receive support with English until he/she demonstrates proficiency. The proper identification of English learners not only allows for appropriate instruction and decreases the chance of improper placement in special education, but also reduces the dropout rate (Abedi, 2008). This leads me to assert that proper identification of English learners can be a force of liberation in the educational realm.

The previous section that covered laws and policies explored mainly historical and qualitative data, but this section on tools and procedures will look at both quantitative and qualitative data. According to Abedi (2008), English learner identification processes do not produce consistent outcomes. In his study that re-examines and re-calculates data from randomized field studies across the United States, Abedi (2008) notes that "the most important prerequisite to providing appropriate instruction and fair and valid assessment for ELL students is to correctly identify them" (p. 28). Looking closer at home language surveys and then initial identification assessments shows that there is still a long way to go in ensuring valid and reliable classification of English learners.

Home Language Surveys

The registration paperwork for a district often includes documents such as proof of residence, emergency contacts, and, the focus of this portion of the literature review, the home language survey and initial identification assessment. The home language survey is a document that is a part of many districts' processes for identifying which students will need their English language proficiency (ELP) assessed when registering for school (Ragan & Lesaux, 2006). Though it is not required of all districts across the country, it is a recommended practice for accurately identifying students who need further testing at the point of registration (Lhamon & Gupta, 2015). Under federal law, all states must screen or assess students in a timely manner at the beginning of the school year, but, surprisingly, the home language survey itself is not a required element of that process in every state (Bailey & Kelly, 2012). In a review of state policies on home language surveys, Bailey and Kelly (2012) discovered that states fall into four main categories of HLS implementation policy: (1) states that mandate the home language survey and have a single home language survey

(or set of questions) that is a mandated minimum in gathering information about students' language background, (2) states that mandate the home language survey and have a sample form that can be adapted, (3) states that mandate the home language survey but districts can make their own and, finally, (4) states that do not mandate any home language survey procedure. Massachusetts falls into category 1, as there is a mandated home language survey (see examples in different languages from Massachusetts in Appendix A). It should be noted, however, that Massachusetts' home language survey and process has been under scrutiny because of the state and local oversight from the Department of Justice (Lhamon & Gupta, 2015; U.S. Department of Education, OCR, 2015).

In Massachusetts, districts are responsible for ensuring that all families fill out a home language survey at the point of school registration, even if the family members are known to be native English speakers (DESE, 2016). Students may need support with their language development even if they have only spent time with a grandparent who speaks another language or a daycare provider who speaks both English and another language. For this reason, *all* families must be given the home language survey. However, the policies that mandate the HLS in Massachusetts have not always been followed with fidelity (Slama et al., 2015). Not following this mandate for all families could be seen as a manifestation of linguoracism, as schools may only administer the home language survey to students and families who "look like" or "sound like" they need the home language survey because the district anticipates that they will indeed be identified as an English learner once tested. One study of English learner identification and placement showed that there was slight over-identification of ELs due mostly to "inaccurate parent responses on the home language survey and schools' lack of knowledge about students' prior academic history" (Kim et al.,

2018, p. 20). Based on this study, the authors come to the conclusion that more research needs to be done on the factors that lead to variability in outcomes, which was a major goal of my study as well.

Research on the home language survey itself is frequently inconclusive because of the variables involved that often cannot be tested. The most accurate way to measure the reliability and validity of the home language survey would be to tie English language proficiency assessments to the responses on the home language survey. However, this cannot be done without a carefully controlled experimental design because existing data most often do not include the proficiency assessment of students whose families report English as their primary language on the home language survey (Goldenberg & Quach, 2010; Haas et al., 2015). In other words, in many cases, if a parent reports that the student is fluent, then no further testing is done. Consequently, at this time, English language proficiency cannot be defined by the difference between a native English speaker's score and the score of a student who is learning English.

In another study of home language surveys, researchers in California found that there was a high degree of predictive accuracy (90%) between the home language survey and assignment of EL status (Haas et al., 2015). This study showed that the HLS score thresholds directly affected which students would then be assessed for language proficiency. It also tested a new survey that could possibly identify more English learners. Adjusting the threshold for eligibility up and down on this new survey did not improve the predictive accuracy and correlation between students who are eligible based on the HLS and students who then qualify as English learners based on the language proficiency assessment. One such calculation even lowered the predictive accuracy rate to 75% (Haas et al., 2015). Maximizing

predictive accuracy, however, means potentially missing students. This study showed that there is a sizable cohort of students who may be multilingual and/or need ESL instruction but will not, unfortunately, even be screened due to their eligibility based on their responses to the home language survey. If the parents falsely or mistakenly report English as the dominant language, the student will then not be tested and therefore may slip through the cracks. Not reporting a language other than English can be linked to a sense of pride, fear, or even not understanding the questions on the home language survey if the survey has not been translated into the family's language or if the parent/guardian cannot read in his/her own language or English. Parents who understand the HLS and related process but choose to not report a language other than English often do so in order to ensure that their children not be identified as an EL (Z. Zakharia & E. Montano, personal communication, October 2020).

Once a student is identified, his/her parent(s)/guardian(s) do have the opportunity to "opt out" as per policy. In Jackson, for example, the opt out procedures are as follows:

> If a parent believes that his/her child should be placed in a program other than Jackson Public School's English Language Learner program, the parent has the right to decline ELE services ("opt out" of the program) for the child. The parent's decision to opt out must be voluntary and informed, and not the product of district influence, or the result of inadequate or inaccurate district resources or information.

However, students whose parents have opted out are still given many of the same supports as other identified EL students, as *all* students have a right to education that they can access. The major difference is that the student does not receive direct instruction from an ESL teacher but he/she is still assessed annually and placed with an SEI endorsed teacher.

In a different quantitative study of home language survey questions, Goldenberg and Quach (2010) found that just one question (about what language the student speaks most often) on the Arizona home language survey led to a 18% difference in the number of students identified as English learners. Though Arizona does have a "backup" system where educators can refer a student for testing, the research still showed that somewhere between 11% and 18% of students eligible for identification and services remain unidentified because of the gatekeeping nature of the questions and cut-off scores for the Arizona home language survey (Goldenberg & Quach, 2010).

In part because the home language survey is not standardized across districts and states, the constructs that the surveys are trying to measure are not well defined (Linquanti & Bailey, 2014). According to the U.S. Department of Education, the home language is defined as a survey that captures information about a student's language background (Lhamon & Gupta, 2015). Beyond that, the states hold much of the decision-making power when it comes to the home language survey. Much of the literature focuses on the questions and survey design, when it would be more useful to first define the constructs that the home language surveys are targeting (Fowler, 1995). It is clear that a consensus on the definition of proficiency and the targets of the home language survey would improve identification practices for English learners.

A working group convened in 2014 produced one of the few qualitative reports on home language surveys. In this report, the group (convened by the Council of Chief State School Officers—or CCSSO) focuses on the following areas: purposes and intended uses, key constructs, home language survey question formulation, administrative procedures, and decision rules (Linquanti & Bailey, 2014). Administrative procedures (both policy and

practice) do impact the results of the HLS. In Massachusetts, one example of an administrative procedure is that the home language survey must be administered and interpreted by a trained professional (DESE, 2016). This trained professional can administer the form but also probe different questions in an interview format. Though this might make the interpretation of results less objective, it does allow for further information about the student's language history. Having an opportunity to probe for additional information is especially helpful for families and guardians who do not have much background on their child's language use (due to separation from family, foster care, adoption, etc.). In this same vein, Linquanti and Bailey's (2014) report reminds readers and policy makers that inclusive language, especially that which acknowledges that not all guardians are parents, needs to be included in home language surveys. Even seemingly small policies such as using inclusive language can be a force of humanization and liberation.

Despite there being many studies that look at home language surveys (Abedi, 2008; Goldenberg & Quach, 2010; Haas et al., 2015), there are still many opportunities to explore the places where these studies remain silent. One silence is the lack of studies that explicitly examine the racial and linguistic biases at play in both the established systems and the interpersonal interactions of school registration. Additionally, there is no mention of English learners with cognitive and/or emotional/behavioral disabilities in research on home language surveys, even though there is an abundance of such research regarding assessment of English learners. What also stands out to me is that there is no mention of whether there even should be a home language survey. What if identification assessments were universal so that schools were able to capture the full range of language proficiency—from beginner to proficient? The home language survey could then be a source of information but not the sole trigger for

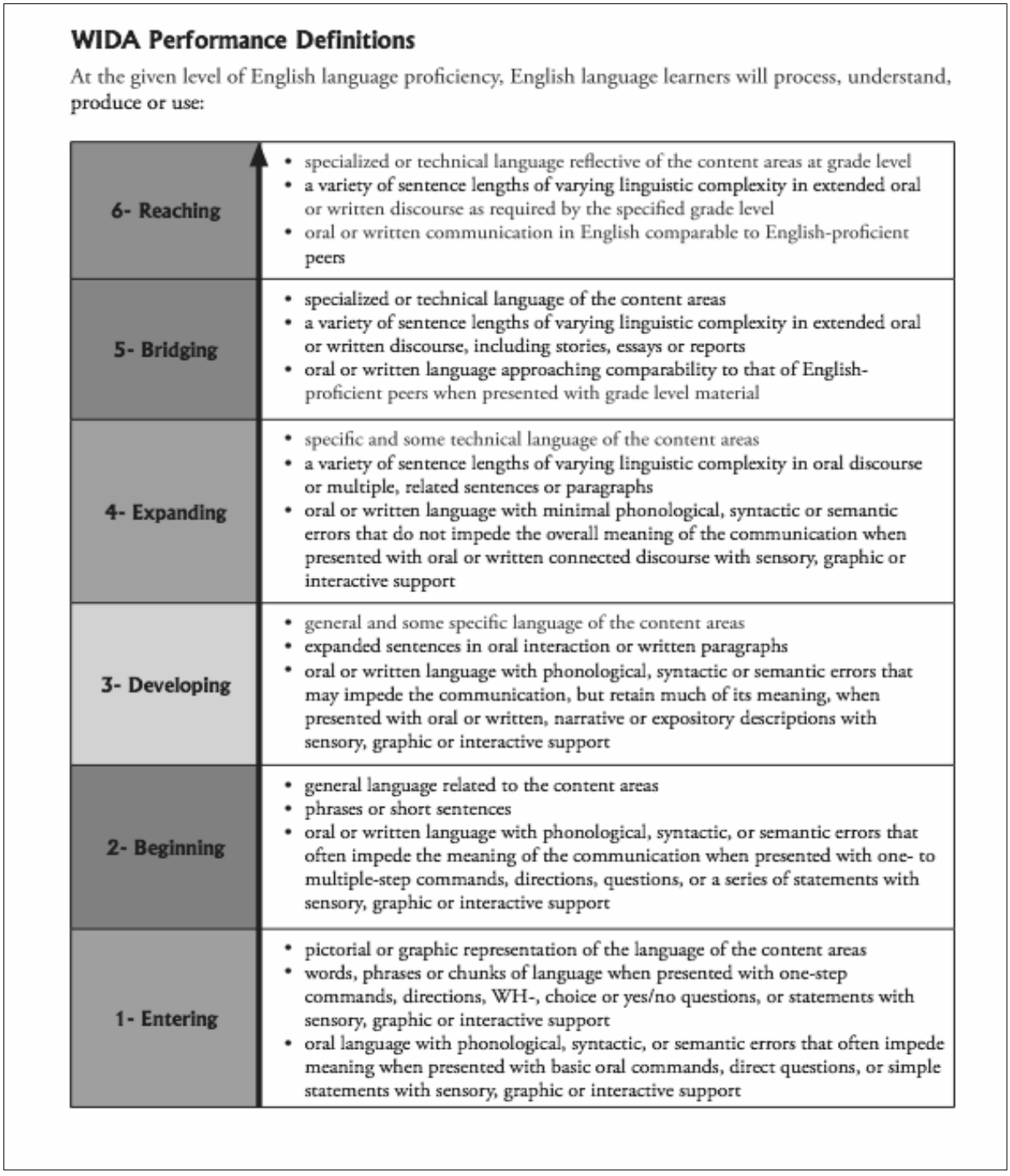
identification assessments. Though it might be a costly endeavor (both financially and time-wise), might it be easier to focus on the reliability and validity of the assessment tool for all students, rather than honing two instruments (the home language survey and the identification assessment) for each individual state?

Initial Identification Assessment

Examining the literature about assessment of English learners gives insight to how assessment is currently used and what processes lead to assessment. As explained in the previous section on home language surveys, if a student qualifies for assessment based on the responses to the home language survey questions, then the next step is for the student to be assessed for his or her language proficiency in English (Appendix B contains examples of initial identification assessment test items). Language proficiency is assessed by a district- or state-determined measure and must include listening, speaking, reading, and writing for all ages and proficiency levels, though this is more difficult for younger students who have early beginner literacy skills (Lhamon & Gupta, 2015). Though proficiency in a language is measured on a scale (usually some form of beginner, intermediate, advanced, etc.; see Figure 2), English learner status is a binary classification based on a one-time assessment at the point of registration (Lopez et al., 2016). The resulting proficiency levels then dictate what types of services students will receive and, in some states, will dictate the required number of minutes of direct English instruction each day. Massachusetts, along with 38 other state education agencies in the United States, participates in a consortium called WIDA which sets standards for Language Development (see Figure 2), creates assessments, and promotes research on language acquisition (Board of Regents, 2014).

Figure 2

Performance Definitions from WIDA Consortium (2012)



WIDA Performance Definitions

At the given level of English language proficiency, English language learners will process, understand, produce or use:

6- Reaching	• specialized or technical language reflective of the content areas at grade level • a variety of sentence lengths of varying linguistic complexity in extended oral or written discourse as required by the specified grade level • oral or written communication in English comparable to English-proficient peers
5- Bridging	• specialized or technical language of the content areas • a variety of sentence lengths of varying linguistic complexity in extended oral or written discourse, including stories, essays or reports • oral or written language approaching comparability to that of English-proficient peers when presented with grade level material
4- Expanding	• specific and some technical language of the content areas • a variety of sentence lengths of varying linguistic complexity in oral discourse or multiple, related sentences or paragraphs • oral or written language with minimal phonological, syntactic or semantic errors that do not impede the overall meaning of the communication when presented with oral or written connected discourse with sensory, graphic or interactive support
3- Developing	• general and some specific language of the content areas • expanded sentences in oral interaction or written paragraphs • oral or written language with phonological, syntactic or semantic errors that may impede the communication, but retain much of its meaning, when presented with oral or written, narrative or expository descriptions with sensory, graphic or interactive support
2- Beginning	• general language related to the content areas • phrases or short sentences • oral or written language with phonological, syntactic, or semantic errors that often impede the meaning of the communication when presented with one- to multiple-step commands, directions, questions, or a series of statements with sensory, graphic or interactive support
1- Entering	• pictorial or graphic representation of the language of the content areas • words, phrases or chunks of language when presented with one-step commands, directions, WH-, choice or yes/no questions, or statements with sensory, graphic or interactive support • oral language with phonological, syntactic, or semantic errors that often impede meaning when presented with basic oral commands, direct questions, or simple statements with sensory, graphic or interactive support

In Massachusetts, students receive direct English instruction from a licensed English as a Second Language teacher (ESL) and must be taught by content area teachers who have been trained in sheltering strategies (DESE, 2016). Sheltering means that a teacher is aware of and controls the language that is used to teach content, while incorporating different instructional strategies to increase English learners' access to content (DESE, 2016). This type of "sheltering" is often called SCI (sheltered content instruction) or SEI (sheltered English immersion) and is a way to help English learner students learn content. ESL teachers are then able to focus on teaching the language necessary in order to communicate with others in English and understand content. Sheltering can happen in many different academic subjects and the standards that WIDA have created cover the following: (1) social and instructional language, (2) the language of Language Arts, (3) the language of Mathematics, (4) the language of Science, (5) the language of Social Studies (WIDA Consortium, 2012). These standards, unlike the Common Core State Standards, dictate that ESL teachers teach language through content (Coleman & Goldenberg, 2012; WIDA Consortium, 2012).

According to Lopez et al. (2016), having a binary system of classification (English learner vs. Non-English learner) undermines the complexity of multilingualism. Creating such a divide can be seen as a force of linguoracism, as students are categorized by those who speak the language of power and come from the dominant culture and those who do not speak the language of power and are not from the dominant culture. For this reason, it is important to examine the issue through the lens of critical theory and, in particular, intersectionality in order to understand how student backgrounds and demographics may or may not affect the process. It also should be noted that language learning is a lifelong

endeavor, as one learns new words and concepts for his/her whole life, even in one's native language.

The particular assessments that are used for the initial identification of English learners are not mandated by federal policy. Depending on the state, certain assessments are recommended and/or required. In Massachusetts, for example, the assessment must be a screener test created by the WIDA consortium for students in grades K-12 (DESE, 2016). These screening tests are not appropriate for younger students, however, and so there are alternative tests for pre-K students (DESE, 2016). Mandating a particular test, however, is a fairly new policy in Massachusetts. Previously, school districts used whatever assessments they had available and had purchased.

Research on identification assessments most often focus on the assessment tool itself and the structures that lead to assessment (Abedi, 2008; Park & Thomas, 2012). In addition, there is much research on what accommodations English learners need when taking standardized tests (Abedi et al., 2004), though initial identification assessments are designed specifically for English learners and therefore have built-in support. Though English proficiency tests are often standardized and/or normed, they measure proficiency in a way that is different from the way that standardized achievement tests measure language. In a study comparing English proficiency levels and achievement testing, Abedi (2008) found a weak association ($w^2 = .057 - .108$) suggesting that scores from standardized achievement tests do not correlate to English proficiency levels and therefore should not be a means of measuring English learners' progress.

Assessment of English Learners with Disabilities. The literature on English Learners with disabilities, though not all specific to initial identification, gives insight into how initial identification assessments may not always accurately measure the English language proficiency of a student with a disability. Understanding the subgroup of students with cognitive and/or emotional/behavioral disabilities is essential in understanding many of the important factors that play into the identification process and whether a student is properly identified and given the support he/she needs. Students who fall into these disability categories often are under- or over- identified as English learners due to factors including (but not limited to) the effect of their disability on the assessment given for English proficiency or concerns on whether a students' difficulties accessing their education are due to language or disability (or both; Artiles, 2019; Gage et al., 2013; Morgan et al., 2015; Slama et al., 2015; Trainor et al., 2016). For many students, disability is perceived as a language proficiency issue and the proper testing is not administered. Or, conversely, disability testing is administered to a student who is struggling due to English proficiency and he/she is improperly identified as EL/SWD. It should be noted that students' achievement can be affected by language proficiency, disability, or both. In addition to all of these factors, there is the overarching questions of the data's ability to illuminate the "how" and "why" of over- and under- identification of English learner students with disabilities and whether our public school systems are set up to provide a disservice to English learner students (MacSwan & Rolstad, 2006).

Lesaux (2006) argues that there needs to be more varied research on the topic, as many of the studies on assessment of English learners are overly generalized and there is not yet a consensus in the field on the normative developmental trajectories of English learners

(both with and without disabilities). The lack of a normative trajectory is complicated by the fact that students who are identified as English learners come from many different backgrounds and, therefore, within-group variability is often ignored (Artiles & Klingner, 2006; Park & Thomas, 2012). As mentioned in the laws and policies section, policy and literature categorize English learner students in many different ways, though the policies do not always reflect awareness of the needs of these groups. Lists of English learner sub-groups often contain the following: long term ELs (students who have been identified as English learners but have not been able to exit the program in a timely manner), EL students with disabilities (EL/SWD), refugee students, migrants, students with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE), etc. (DESE, 2016). This list, however helpful, fails to capture the variability within each of these categories, and the intersectionality that may occur between categories (García et al., 2012).

It is important to note that in the same way that a student's disability may affect his/her initial identification assessment, so might a student's language proficiency (in his/her native language(s) or English or both) affect his/her testing for the diagnosis of a disability. Due to trying to safeguard against overrepresentation of minority students in many disability categories, the government requires districts to report on percentages of students in disability categories (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015). However, the literature shows evidence of underrepresentation of minorities (and language minority/EL students) in some disability categories (Gage et al., 2013; Morgan et al., 2015; Slama et al., 2015). Though minority is not always a helpful (or politically correct) descriptor, in this case it refers to racial, ethnic, and language minority students. In a study of a number of intersecting factors, Morgan et al. (2015) discovered that minority students (including but not exclusively English learners) are

underrepresented in several cognitive disability categories. Using hazard modeling of longitudinal data, Morgan et al. (2015) found that language minority students are less likely to be identified as having learning disabilities or speech/language impairments ($p < .05$ and $p < .01$ respectively). Likewise, English learner students are underrepresented in emotional/behavioral disability categories, as discovered in a meta-analysis of literature by Gage et al. (2013). This could point to better testing procedures, or possibly delaying important testing for students. One major limitation of this study by Morgan et al. (2015), however, is the fact that the researchers only looked at students in kindergarten through eighth grade. Demographic data on English learners show that, since most English learners are born in the United States, then there are larger percentages of students identified as English learners in the early grades (Slama et al., 2015). Due to a desire for long-term data tracking, many studies look at students starting in kindergarten and therefore create data that are not generalizable to the whole population of English learner students (Morgan et al., 2015; Slama et al., 2015). Another limitation of the data on underrepresentation by Morgan et al. (2015) is that language minority status was determined by whether the parents' kindergarten entrance interview was conducted in English or in another language. Regardless of these limitations, it is important to remember that the findings still encourage practices which will promote liberation for students and will battle linguoracism—such as being cognizant of the cultural and linguistic baggage that special education assessments may carry and selecting assessments which reduce cultural and linguistic bias (Morgan et al., 2015). When viewed through the lens of critical organizational theory, identification of students with disabilities, especially students of color and students with a different language background is not a neutral process. Artiles (2019) reminds readers that "this problem is not

only about diagnostic accuracy" (p. 332). In other words, there are many factors outside of the quality of the assessment itself that leads to both under- and over- representation of so-called minority students in special education.

Another practice which must be examined is first language proficiency assessment. These types of assessments are a recommended part of the identification process for SLIFE (DESE, 2015). In a survey administered to states in 2000-2001, 13 states (equaling one quarter of the nation's English learners) assess a student's first language at school registration (Mahoney & MacSwan, 2005). Though these data are dated, it points to the proliferation of a practice that is not supported by research. According to MacSwan and Rolstad (2006), the practice of assessing a student's first language at the point of registration leads to increased identification of special educational needs. Students who score low on these assessments are then assumed to have deficiencies in their first language, even though the assessments given are not designed for that purpose. MacSwan and Rolstad's study demonstrates the over-identification of English learners with disabilities by comparing the first language assessment scores with natural language samples from the students. Based on the data from this study, 75-90% of students who are given a standardized assessment in their native language show deficits in that language. In analyzing natural language samples, however, most students demonstrate average language ability in their first language and only 2% were shown to have major deficits in their native language (MacSwan & Rolstad, 2006).

Based on the examination of home language surveys and initial identification assessments, it is evident that the power and dominance that exists at various intersections, especially that of students with disabilities. As discussed in the theoretical framework section of Chapter 1, critical stance has been proven to be an effective means of liberation for

students. Critical educators and their students can uncover dominance and help the oppressed to gain a voice, while simultaneously both becoming more human. Human beings have inherent worth and dignity and should be treated as such. Freirean methods of education fight racism, hegemony, dominance, and oppression, as they make one's inherent value and dignity an integral part of pedagogy (Crotty, 2015). How much more, then, would students and their families be liberated if critical stance were to be practiced not just in classroom pedagogy, but also in school policy and practice and, in particular, the policies that govern school registration and the resulting practices. Language can be a powerful source of power that can be harnessed for good. If educators, administrators, and school policy makers check their own biases and engage with communities outside of the walls of the school, students and families will be empowered and liberated (King & Scott, 2014).

Summary

In considering the history of English language programs and school registration processes, it is evident that the process of school registration is an integral part of the proper placement of English learners into educational programs that address their language needs. Viewing registration as a gate-keeping practice, especially through the theoretical framework of critical organizational praxis, have allowed me to better understand the larger societal forces at play in this seemingly benign process. Both conscious and subconscious beliefs and subsequent actions about language, race, ability, etc. play into the registration process and influence a student's schooling placement and educational trajectory.

In reviewing the literature, I can confidently say that the major gap in the literature is that of the knowledge and attitude of educators on outcomes of English learner identification and placement. Since it is helpful to all stakeholders involved for students to be properly

identified as English Learners, and this is an urgent matter that affects a sizable percentage of our state and national student body, I studied the implementation of English learner identification policy at the local (district) level. I employed a mixed-methods explanatory sequential methodology that captures the perceived outcome of the process from educators' points of view (Shaw et al., 2006; Yin, 2013). As I framed my work through critical constructivism and intersectionality it was important to illuminate the many nesting layers at play when looking at school registration for English learners (Duff, 2014). Though the unit of analysis was educator knowledge of and attitude toward initial identification and placement, the layers of individual, school, society, etc. were considered throughout the process in order to highlight the forces at play during school registration. I was only able to skim the surface of this, however, and so future research must include a more thorough analysis of the impact of societal forces on this process. This ties back to my problem of practice, which is the inauthentic praxis in the process of identifying English learners at the district level and the need for students to be identified and placed properly in order for them to receive a solid and liberating education.

Measuring the knowledge and attitude that educators have about English learner identification and placement was an important first step in addressing this gap in the literature. As the number of English learner students increases in districts across the United States (DESE, 2017b; U.S. Department of Education, NCES, 2016), so does the pressure on educators to meet the needs of their students. This pressure is further exacerbated by accountability measures that incorporate students' standardized testing scores into teachers' performance evaluations (DESE, 2017c). My contribution to this field of research is data and

analysis that describe the phenomenon of English learner identification and placement by highlighting the voices of educators of ELs.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Throughout my time as a classroom teacher, I worked diligently to instill in my students the belief that their stories mattered. They were greeted by this message each and every day as they entered my classroom. The message was posted outside the classroom so that other students and teachers might catch on too. I have found that telling my story and hearing the stories of others has affected my life in profound ways because it allows me to connect with those around me and is a reminder that I am not alone in the struggles that I have. In my reading and research, I have learned, however, that storytelling at times is not enough. In this particular case, it will not sufficiently uncover the complexities of inauthentic praxis in the English learner identification process. Therefore, in order to fully capture how these programs operate while simultaneously capturing the stories of stakeholders, I employed an explanatory sequential mixed methods design for data collection and analysis (Creswell, 2014; Mertens, 2014). The focus of this research was on capturing educators' perspectives (particularly knowledge and attitude) on the policies and processes that govern school registration, which in turn impact the stories of other stakeholders and, in particular, the students and families whose voices are not always heard.

In chapter 1, I reviewed the problem of practice, the significance of the problem, and the theories of critical pedagogy, critical constructivism, and intersectionality. The next

chapter, Chapter 2, reviewed the theoretical framework, highlighted important literature pertaining to the problem of practice, and examined the literature through the lens of critical organizational praxis. In this chapter, I will discuss the research design and methodology that I employed in my own research study that looked at educator perspectives on issues related to identification and placement for English learners and their families. In keeping with the previous chapters, my theoretical framework guided my planning and execution of the research study and was a lens through which I viewed my findings.

In this chapter, I will review the justification and rationale for the use of explanatory sequential mixed methods research as a methodological design and then explain in depth the complete research design that was implemented. Based on the gaps in the literature (knowledge and attitude of educators on outcomes of English learner identification and placement), I sought to answer the following questions by capturing stakeholders' interpretations of the process. In keeping with my program's concentration on evaluation and applied research measurement, my research questions from Chapter 1 remained the focus of my methodological design:

- What knowledge do educators of English learners have about the process of identification and placement and how might an educator's background (demographic data) influence this knowledge?
- What are educators' attitudes about the process of English learner identification and placement and how might an educator's background (demographic data) influence these attitudes?

As noted in Chapter 1, knowledge and attitude are self-reported, so when this paper refers to the concepts of knowledge and attitude in the data, it is assumed that it is stated/self-reported knowledge and attitude.

As the former leader of an English learner program, I have learned that my influence on district level policy had the potential to lead to improved practice and, most importantly, humanization and liberation for English learners and their families. Conducting this research allowed me to understand the status quo in a district and, more importantly, will hopefully be a catalyst for continuing conversations about initiating programmatic changes needed in order to ensure equity for students with a background in a language other than or in addition to English. By basing the study on the framework of critical organizational praxis and viewing the results through the coming together of critical theory, intersectionality, and critical constructivism, the knowledge created by this study has the potential to be transformative rather than just merely observational (Creswell, 2014; Mertens, 2008, 2014).

Rationale for Using Explanatory Mixed Methods

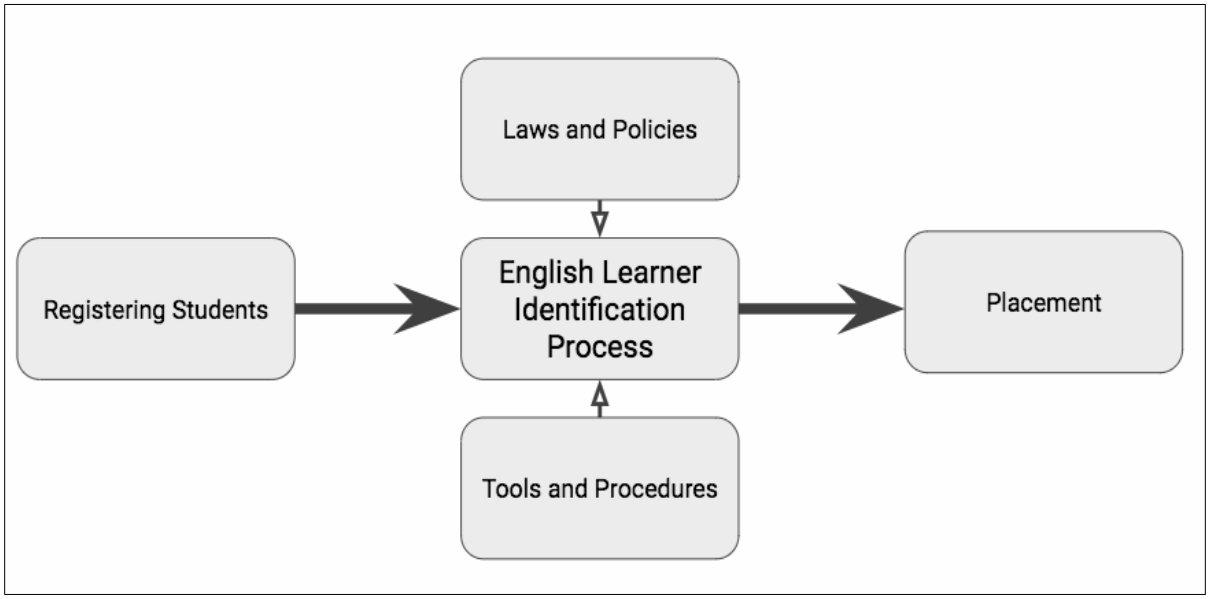
Mixed methods as a research method is best defined as an approach in which the researcher "gathers both quantitative (closed-ended) and quantitative (open-ended) data, integrates the two, and then draws interpretations based on the combined strengths of both sets of data to understand research problems" (Creswell, 2014). I chose mixed methods research as my research methodology because my working hypothesis was that the school registration process does not always lead to its designed outcome as far as the correct identification of students as English learner or non- English learner, and I believed that this phenomenon would be best captured through the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data. As noted in chapter 1, it is important for all stakeholders (not just the

students themselves) for students to be properly identified as English learners by their school district given the importance of academic language in providing opportunities for students and their families and ensuring that educators are given the information needed in order to design instruction that meets the needs of their students.

Creswell (2014) emphasizes the point that mixed methods research must not be solely the gathering of both quantitative and qualitative data; each type of data must be collected and analyzed in a rigorous way and then integrated thoroughly. Because there is little research on the topic at hand (the inauthentic praxis in the English learner identification process), both types of data were necessary to form a clear picture of the phenomenon. Because the findings of this study will inform future policy, there must be quantitative findings that policymakers can refer to (C. Marshall & Rossman, 2014). Marshall and Rossman (2014) qualify this even further when explaining that mixed methods studies require determining whether the quantitative or qualitative data will be in the foreground when reporting findings. For this study, the qualitative findings will be in the foreground because, as will be explained in depth below, the initial quantitative data collected (survey) paved the way for the qualitative data collection and analysis (interviews) by molding the topics that were discussed.

Figure 3

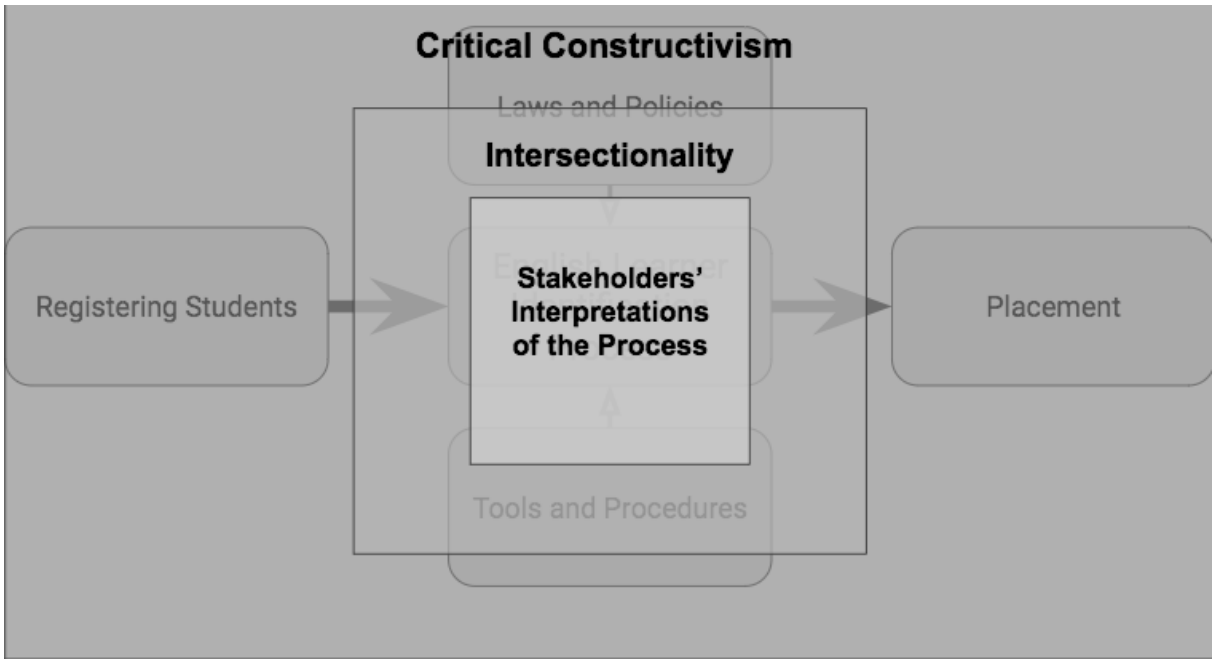
English Learner Identification Process



In looking at the conceptual framework which has guided my inquiry (see Figure 3), one can see that the different types of data collected illuminate the different pieces of the process. Using critical organizational praxis as a tool for analysis was helpful in illuminating how theory interacts with and explains the quantitative and qualitative findings (see Figure 4).

Figure 4

Conceptual Framework: English Learner Identification Layered with Critical Organizational Praxis Theory



Research Design and Procedures

By utilizing a mixed methods design, my study both illuminated the broad numerical trends related to the study (enrollment, demographics, etc.) and the qualities and practices of EL identification through quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis. In this particular case of explanatory research, mixed methods was an appropriate design due to its ability to not just measure objectively but to also be positioned as transformative (Creswell, 2014; Mertens, 2008, 2014). Using an explanatory sequential mixed methods design, I collected and analyzed data in two distinct phases. The first phase consisted of a survey of educators in the district. The second phase consisted of interviews with educators who completed the survey and indicated interest in participating further, were recommended by

other interviewees, or expressed interest when contacted by myself and/or district administrators. Sequential design means that one type of data informs the collection of another type of data (Creswell, 2014; Mertens, 2014), so in this case, the initial findings from the survey helped to form the basis for the interview questions. Because of the gap in the literature surrounding the implementation of English learner identification policies, the survey measured constructs that were explained in more depth by the interviews (thus an explanatory sequential mixed methods design). By including both qualitative and quantitative methods, I captured English learner identification and placement in a way that could not have been accomplished with only qualitative or quantitative methods. This integration of qualitative and quantitative data is what makes mixed methods research not only helpful, but vital to forming a complete picture of the topic being studied (Creswell, 2014).

Setting of Research Study

This research was be conducted during the 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 school years in the Jackson[2] Public Schools. Jackson is a low-incidence (meaning less than 100 EL students) district with a growing population of English Learners. The program consists two major components: SEI instruction and ESL instruction as described in Chapter 2. Like many other suburban districts, Jackson follows a program model that consists of EL students being taken out of regular classes in order to receive direct instruction from an ESL teacher. Though Jackson's policy allows for multiple models of instruction (hybrid, pull out, push in, etc.), pull out is what happens in practice. Students with lower level proficiency as determined by WIDA testing receive two to three periods of instruction daily, while higher proficiency

[2] pseudonym

students receive at least one period a day of instruction. The remainder of the day is spent with non-EL peers in mainstream classes that are taught by SEI endorsed teachers.

Jackson has made many changes in their programming in order to meet the changing needs of their population, but still has items to work on after a recent review by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2017a). The current state of the EL program in Jackson makes it an ideal place to examine the problem of practice, even though it must be acknowledged that the setting is not reflective of all districts and types of districts in the Commonwealth or across the United States.

Quantitative Phase

In the first phase, a survey was given to all district educators (Appendix C). The purpose of the survey was to measure stakeholder perspectives of and experiences with the implementation of English learner identification policy.

Data Collection. The survey was distributed via email on May 19, 2019 with the survey window closing on June 7, 2019. The district has approximately 260 teachers (260.6 FTE; DESE, 2017b) and all were sent a link to the survey which was web-based and hosted on the platform Qualtrics. At the end of the survey window, Qualtrics recorded 71 responses, 10 of which did not contain any data. Therefore, the sample size was 61 educators (N = 61) which is approximately 23.5% of those who were sent the survey.

Survey data was securely stored in a Qualtrics account that was provided by the University of Massachusetts Boston. Following Qualtrics' recommendations for security[3], data access was restricted to myself and I had a strong account password. As indicated on the

[3] https://www.qualtrics.com/security-statement/

consent form (Appendix E), data collected was confidential and was not presented in a way that would allow anyone to identify the participants. The only personal identifying information collected was the name and/or e-mail address from survey participants who were interested in a follow-up interview. These responses were not linked to survey data.

Data Analysis. Data from the survey was exported from Qualtrics into SPSS, formatted, and prepared for analysis. First, I ran descriptive statistics on all items. Items were then recoded into binary categories in order to quickly discover broader trends. Next, items with Likert scale responses were analyzed quantitatively with SPSS using the concepts and indicators from the survey instrument. Tests included one-way ANOVA tests and independent samples t-tests. The goal was to test the null hypothesis, which was "There is no statistically significant difference between groups (grouped by demographic responses) when looking at (concept or indicator)." Depending on the number of demographic categories for a particular question, the concepts and indicators were tested for statistically significant differences through ANOVA and/or independent samples t-tests.

Open response questions from the survey were analyzed qualitatively. Because there is a gap in the literature surrounding the knowledge and attitude of educators on outcomes of English learner identification and placement, these data were essential for exploration of the topic and to identify what the interviews can and should measure. The responses were run through the program "Tab Crowd" in order to measure word frequency.

Qualitative Phase

The next phase of data collection consisted of stakeholder interviews. The interviews addressed the questions of *what* the local policies look like in practice and *how* these practices may or may not be affected by student demographics as perceived by stakeholders.

Data Collection. The first round of interviews (n = 13) were conducted via phone in November and December of 2019. A small number of interviewees were those who had expressed interest in response to a question on the survey. Because of a smaller response than expected, additional interviewees were recruited via emails to staff from principals. Interviewees completed and returned consent forms via email and after the interview were gifted $5 electronic gift cards to Dunkin' as a token of appreciation (as per IRB application and approval).

I then transcribed the audio recordings from the initial 13 interviews and entered them into the computer program Dedoose (version 8.3.18, 2020) for coding and analysis. A second round of interviews based on recommendations for participants from previous interviewees yielded two additional interviews that were conducted and transcribed in February of 2020. This brought the total to 15 (N = 15). Interview transcriptions were stored in Dedoose[4] and I restricted access to only myself and had a strong account password. Audio recordings and other research materials were stored securely in a Google Drive account, again with restricted access and a strong password, and were destroyed at the end of the study.

During the interviews themselves, question wording varied slightly due to the flow of the conversation and/or the role of the interview respondent (for example, not all respondents were classroom teachers). I also ended each interview by asking participants if there was anything else that would be important for me to know and whether the participant could recommend a colleague to participate.

[4] https://www.dedoose.com/about/security

Because of the importance of the sequential nature of the phases of my research, the interview questions were created not only based on the research question(s) and theory, but also on the responses from the survey. For example, the question "how does placement affect your responsibilities" follows up on the survey question that asks if having an English learner is/would be difficult (which 75.4% of respondents said that it indeed would be difficult). Additionally, this interview question about responsibilities probes at the source of difficulty and also, for many respondents, elicited a response that can be a helpful measure of attitude and perspective toward teaching English learners. Another way that the survey findings informed the interview questions is through the question about an educator's experience with the placement of English learners. Because educators who had not had English learners in the past few years (see ANOVA data in Chapter 4) had a statistically different knowledge of policy and process, I wanted to understand the educators' perspectives on placement of students in their classes. These interviews allowed me to probe the overarching questions of "what is working" and "what is not working" with the process or English learner identification and placement in the selected school district. The interview findings further elaborated on the findings from the survey (Appendix D for interview questions used).

Data Analysis. With permission from IRB and participants, interviews were audio recorded, transcribed, and coded with the concepts of knowledge and attitude. According to Saldana (2015), coding takes place in two (or more) stages: first cycle coding and second cycle coding (and beyond). For my first cycle of coding, I employed the method of structural coding. Structural coding is when one "applies a content-based or conceptual phrase representing a topic of inquiry to a segment of data to both code and categorize the data corpus" (Saldana, 2015, p. 83). In order to organize my structural codes, I created a coding

scheme based on my research questions (Guetterman & Fetters, 2018; Mihas & Odum Institute, 2019; Saldana, 2015, p. 83; Statistical Services Centre, 2001). These initial codes were for the concepts of knowledge and attitude. For my second cycle of coding, I focused on "pattern coding" in which I sought to categorize my coded data as an "initial analytic strategy" (Saldana, 2015, p. 64). Finally, I analyzed my findings based on my literature review and theoretical framework. This process included reviewing Chapters 1 and 2 in order to help me to frame the information from the interviews in the context of my earlier research (in particular, the literature review). Throughout the process I also wrote memos to help ask and answer questions, keep track of findings, and record progress made. When taken as a whole, these memos provide valuable insight into the analysis of interview data.

Integration of Findings

The discussion in Chapter 5 integrates the quantitative and qualitative data analyses as per the explanatory sequential mixed methods design. Throughout the process, data was analyzed against the conceptual framework format in order to illuminate the findings associated with the implementation of English learner identification policy. Data from the two phases was compared in order to highlight or reconcile any contradictions (or apparent contradictions) that arise. Quantitative and qualitative data was revisited in order to integrate the knowledge created by both the surveys and the interviews.

Research Quality

Quantitative Phase Research Quality

This phase of research consisted of a survey, and therefore most of the data generated in this phase was quantitative in nature and was also analyzed using quantitative methods.

The following sections discuss validity and reliability, as both of these qualities are essential in quality data collection and analysis.

Validity. Survey questions consisted of Likert scale items, which allowed for quantitative analysis of the data (Fowler, 1995). The survey was designed to measure the concepts of knowledge and attitude (as these are tied directly to the research questions). Using the literature and my theoretical framework, I designed questions based on indicators that would capture an educator's experience with English learner identification and placement. In order to ensure validity, the survey questions were honed through the process of a pilot survey with teachers from other districts and a modified version of cognitive interviewing (Fowler, 1995; Willis, 2004). Pilot study participants completed the survey while recording a "think-aloud." Items were then refined based on feedback and participant perceptions of different questions.

Reliability. In order to measure reliability for the quantitative data collection, I performed the calculations in SPSS for Cronbach's alpha (α) for the concept of knowledge and then the concept of attitude. These two concepts were integral to my research at every stage, so it was essential to analyze them for reliability. Tables 1 and 2 show that there indeed is reliability in the scale, as α = .90 for "Knowledge."

Table 1

Descriptive Analysis for Knowledge Concept

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.90	.90	5

In looking at the analysis by item, it is clear that there is reliability within the concept of knowledge. Because Cronbach's alpha is $\alpha = \frac{N\bar{c}}{\bar{v}+(N-1)\bar{c}}$, the inter-item correlation must be high in order for the alpha value to be high. In this case, as seen in Table 2, the inter-item correlation is high enough for the coefficient of reliability (α) to be considered acceptable.

Table 2

Descriptive Analysis for Knowledge Concept by Item

Item	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Please rate your familiarity with the following:			
The process of school registration for all students in my school/district	2.38	1.21	61
The assessment used to identify English learners in Massachusetts (called WIDA screener)	3.10	1.21	61
Federal English learner identification and placement policy	2.18	1.22	61
State English learner identification and placement policy	2.30	1.19	61
District English learner identification and placement policy	2.18	1.16	61

This same process was repeated for the concept of attitude. In order to measure reliability for the concept of attitude, I performed the calculations in SPSS for Cronbach's alpha (α). Table 3 shows that there indeed is reliability in the scale, as α = .76 for the attitude concept.

Table 3

Descriptive Analysis for Attitude Concept

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.76	.75	7

In looking at the analysis by item, it is clear that there is reliability within the concept of attitude, as there is a high inter-item correlation.

Table 4

Descriptive Analysis for Attitude Concept by Item

Item	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Please respond to the following statements:			
Teaching English learners is/would NOT be difficult.	2.16	.61	61
I am confident in my ability to meet the needs of English learners.	2.62	.61	61
I am knowledgeable about the process of identifying English learners.	2.87	.76	61
In my experience, English learners are/have been placed in the correct classes.	2.46	.65	61
The process of identifying and placing English learners is communicated clearly in my district.	1.98	.78	61
My district meets the needs of regular education English learner students.	2.23	.78	61
My district meets the needs of English learner students with a diagnosed disability.	2.11	.80	61

Qualitative Phase Research Quality

In this phase of the research, my data collection and analysis were qualitative and based on educator interviews. Therefore, both validity and reliability looked like "trustworthiness" as defined by scholars in the qualitative field (C. Marshall & Rossman, 2014; Plano Clark & Ivankova, 2015; Shenton, 2004). Though the concept of validity is borrowed from quantitative research, it is still my responsibility as a researcher to ensure that my process is guided by the idea that my method accurately measures what it is intended to measure and achieves consistent results.

Shenton (2004) defines a set of "provisions" which a research may employ in order to address Lincoln and Guba's (1986) four criteria for trustworthiness: (1) credibility, (2) transferability, (3) dependability, and (4) confirmability. Below is a summary of how I addressed each criterion.

Credibility. For the criterion of "credibility," I followed a number of the provisions set forth by Shenton (2004):

- adoption of appropriate well recognized research methods
- development of early familiarity with culture of participating organizations
- triangulation via use of different methods [and] different types of informants
- tactics to help ensure honesty in informants
- peer scrutiny of project
- use of "reflective commentary"
- description of background, qualifications, and experience of the researcher.

(p. 73)

In employing explanatory mixed-methods research, I ensured that my methods were indeed "well recognized." Also, though my familiarity with Jackson could be seen as a limitation, in this case it was helpful as I was very familiar with the district's culture. The process of creating this study as designed by the university allowed for a number of the other provisions to be achieved: these include peer scrutiny (in seminars, email exchanges, etc.), tactics to ensure honesty (IRB application and regulations ensure that participants are able to opt-out at any time). The process also ensured that I have sufficient background and knowledge in order to perform and analyze a study with utmost credibility. As mentioned previously, I also wrote memos throughout the process, and that added to the credibility of this project as well.

Transferability. For transferability, I have followed Shenton's (2004) suggestion that there is "background data to establish context of study and detailed description of phenomenon in question to allow comparisons to be made" (p. 73). This gives the reader enough information in order to make his or her decision regarding applying the knowledge produced by the study in his or her own context.

Dependability. For dependability, I made sure that my methodological description is detailed enough to allow a researcher to repeat the study. Shenton (2004) highlights the importance of dependability not because a future researcher should gain the same results, but rather that the researcher is able to "assess the extent to which proper research practices have been followed" (p. 71).

Confirmability. For the criterion of "confirmability," I utilized the following provisions:

- triangulation to reduce effect of investigator bias
- admission of researcher's beliefs and assumptions

- recognition of shortcomings in study's methods and their potential effects
- in-depth methodological description to allow integrity of research results to be scrutinized
- use of diagrams to demonstrate audit trail. (Shenton, 2004, p. 73)

Throughout the process, I gathered information from as many different sources as possible to reduce bias. In addition, I stated my position and explained my background as often as possible throughout this paper. In this chapter and in the final chapter as well, I made note of the various limitations inherent in my methods and in the study as a whole.

Limitations of the Study

Like many other methods that incorporate qualitative data collection and analysis, this study will be limited by the nature of mixed methods research and the difficulties that come with generalizability. Therefore, findings will be suggestive rather than conclusive (Crotty, 2015), which in turn will allow for further research on the topic. The site selected and the current political climate (locally, nationally, and globally) will also affect the data. Though this study will examine a low-incidence district, it should be noted that, due to migration and urbanization, English learner students in the suburbs are still subject to schooling that can be colonizing in nature through the promotion of assimilation (Leonardo & Hunter, 2007). The portrait painted by this study will be a snapshot of the English learner identification process in one low incidence district in one state. The hope, though, is that it will provide context and analysis that will help other states and districts with their related policies and processes. Even though there are marked difference between low incidence and high incidence districts in terms of the processes of identification and placement (see Chapter 2), viewing the process through the lens of educator attitude and knowledge may be a helpful template that can be

replicated in various types of districts. For this reason, this study will contain both analysis *of* and analysis *for* policy (S. Taylor, 1997). It should also be noted that this study has a small sample size, due to the smaller size of the district and a number of challenges with recruiting participants, including communication with district administration. However, the sample was representative of the district as a whole in a number of ways (see demographic data in Chapter 4) and the findings did show discernable patterns.

Another limitation of the study is the implicit bias that I have as a researcher, especially as an educated white researcher who has positioned herself as an advocate for students and their families. Through each step of the research, I did and continue to acknowledge that research is a situated cultural practice and can be a means of harm if not constantly examined and checked (Arzubiaga et al., 2008). This research aimed to uncover bias and oppression in order to be able to identify and implement liberatory practices. Researching those who are "oppressed" can often reinforce oppression (Smith, 2013), so throughout the process I held myself accountable through conversations about my data with my cohort and my professors, along with friends and mentors who value similar types of research.

Conclusion

My hope for this work is that it urges others to ask the same questions and work to meet the needs of English learners and their families. I aimed to illuminate others' stories, not my own. In the Pulitzer Prize winning ethnographic work entitled *Evicted* by Matthew Desmond (2016), Desmond explains his position on his own role in his research:

> But there is a bigger game afoot. There is an enormous amount of pain and poverty in this rich land. At a time of rampant inequality and widespread hardship, when hunger

> and homelessness are found throughout America, I am interested in a different, more urgent conversation. *"I" don't matter* [emphasis added]. (p. 335)

The way that he positions himself in his research is what makes his work so compelling to me—though he was present in the situations about which he writes, it is not his voice that inspires the reader to work for meaningful change. It is my hope that my research, though methodologically different, espouses this same positionality.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was twofold: first, to understand whether the process of English learner identification and placement leads to the intended outcome, which I conceptualize as appropriate placement, and second, to address a gap in the literature surrounding the identification and placement of English learners. Specifically, the study sought to capture educator knowledge of and attitude toward English learner identification and placement. In this chapter, I review findings from the two phases of data collection and analysis.

Quantitative Data and Analysis

This phase included a survey of educators in the Jackson Public Schools that addressed my research questions. The research questions are:

- What knowledge do educators of English learners have about the process of identification and placement and how might an educator's background (demographic data) influence this knowledge?
- What are educators' attitudes about the process of English learner identification and placement and how might an educator's background (demographic data) influence these attitudes?

Demographic Data

The results of the data collected by the survey are as follows. As for gender, 21.3% of respondents were male, 77.0% were female, and 1.6% preferred not to answer. This is representative of the district as a whole, as 19.5% of district personnel are male and 80.5% are female (DESE, 2019b). For ethnicity, 93.4% identified as white while 3.3% identified as Hispanic/Latino/a. Once again, one participant (1.6%) chose not to answer. This is close to representative of the district, as 97.4% of staff are white (DESE, 2019b). Survey respondents were also asked whether they speak a language other than English, and 16.4% reported yes. The 2015 census reports a slightly lower figure, reporting that 10.2% of the population of Jackson speaks a language other than English (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). However, of course, census data only include residents of a town (and educators do not necessarily live in the town where they work) and includes all residents age 5 and above. Regardless, this difference in percentage can likely be explained by the number of language teachers (ESL and foreign language) who responded to the survey which will be explained below.

Respondent Background Information

The majority of respondents (80.6%) had been teaching for eight years or more. This was followed by 14.5% teaching four to seven years, and 3.2% teaching three years. One response was missing for this question. In addition, two of the demographic questions were multiple response questions, meaning that the respondent could select more than one answer if applicable. The two multiple response questions were as follows:

1. What grade level(s) do you teach? (see Table 5)
2. What subject(s) do you teach? (see Table 6)

Results from these questions showed that the largest number of respondents (n = 28) teach high school level students, followed by K-4 (n = 18), 5-8 (n = 15), and PreK (n = 2).

Table 5

Response Frequencies for Grade Level

Item	Responses	
	N	Percent
What grade level(s) do you teach (select all that apply)?		
PreK	2	3.2%
K-4	18	28.6%
5-8	15	23.8%
9-12+	28	44.4%
Total	63	100.0%

Subjects taught varied significantly more, and the "other" response (n = 11) included the following responses: school psychologist (n = 2), computer science and technology, speech/ language pathologist, health education, guidance (n = 3), and ELL (n = 2).

Table 6

Response Frequencies for Subject Taught

Item	Responses	
	N	Percent
Which subject(s) do you teach? Select all that apply.		
Early childhood/Elementary	15	19.7%
Art	2	2.6%
Business	2	2.6%
English Language Arts (5-12)	11	14.5%
History/Social Studies (5-12)	6	7.9%
Mathematics (5-12)	13	17.1%
Science (any area) (5-12)	5	6.6%
World Language	5	6.6%
Special Education	6	7.9%
Other (please describe):	11	14.5%
Total	76	100.0%

Educator Knowledge

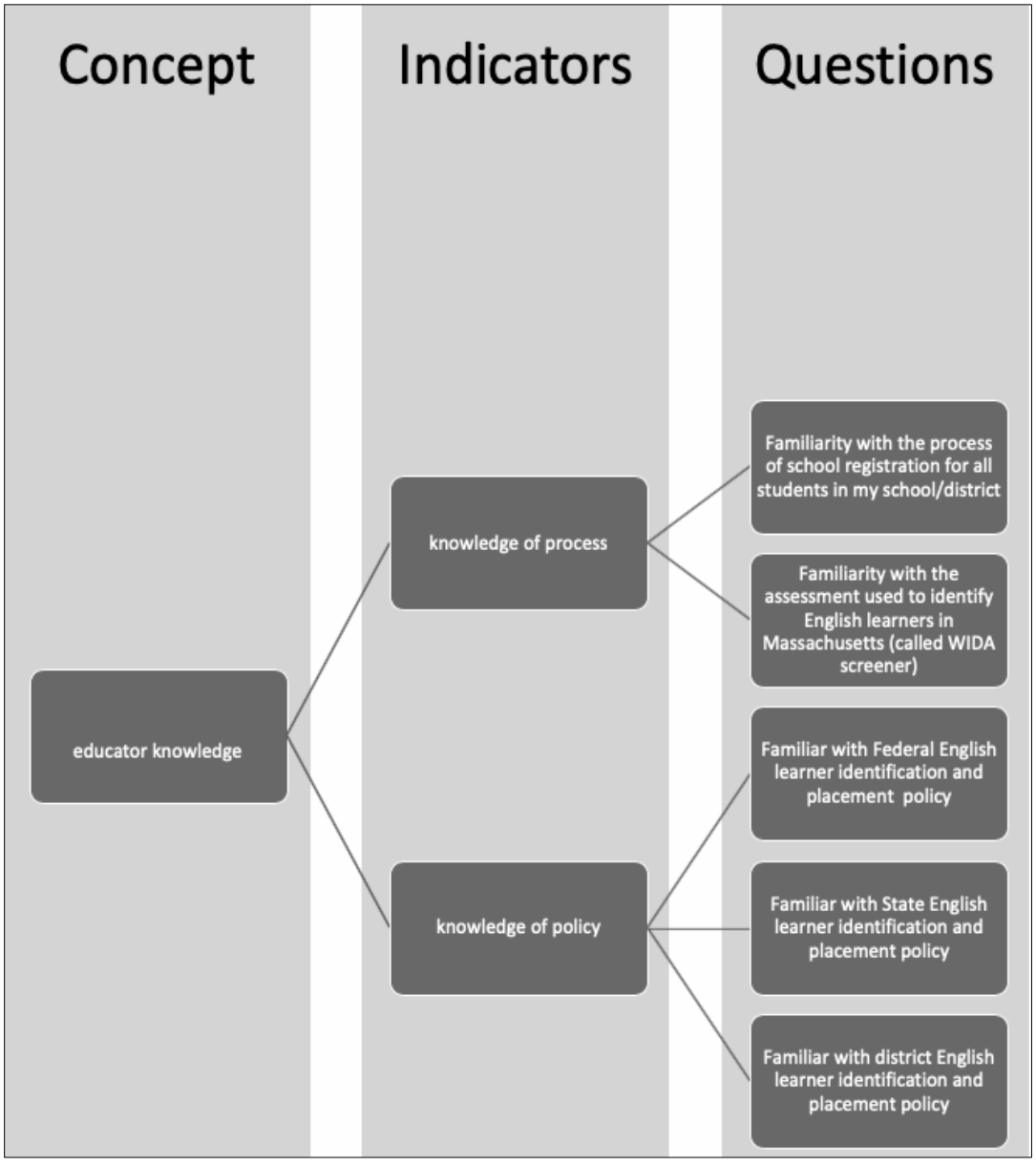
The self-reported data on educator knowledge was collected through the use of Likert scale questions that addressed the following concept and indicators that are linked to the research question being addressed (see survey questions and scales in Appendix C):

- What knowledge do educators of English learners have about the process of identification and placement and how might an educator's background (demographic data) influence this knowledge?
    - concept: knowledge
    - indicators: knowledge of process, knowledge of policy

These concepts and indicators were then measured by specific survey questions as described in Figure 5. The concepts and indicators also guided the quantitative analysis of survey items.

Figure 5

Concept of Educator Knowledge



My first step in capturing trends in the data was to recode the variables into binary categories (agree/disagree and familiar/not familiar) in order to uncover broader trends in the data. Recoding the data into binary categories showed the following:

- the majority of respondents stated that they were familiar with the following (% familiar)
    - The assessment used to identify English learners in Massachusetts (called WIDA screener) (70.5%)
- the majority of respondents stated that they were not familiar with the following (% not familiar)
    - federal English learner identification and placement policy (63.9%)
    - state English learner identification and placement policy (59.0 %)
    - district English learner identification and placement policy (60.7%)
    - the process of school registration for all students in my school/district (57.4%)

The Role of Background Variables in Knowledge. These results led me to ask the following questions of the data: Is there a statistically significant difference in response when the following background variables from the survey are taken into account (age, gender, years teaching, subjects taught, ethnicity)? Answering these questions helped to parse out factors that contribute to educators' knowledge of English learner identification and placement.

To answer this question, I ran one-way ANOVA tests in SPSS for the following variables: number of ELs and age. For the variables that only had two groups (or responses fell into two categories), I ran an independent samples t-test for each to compare the different

indicators and concepts in the variables of years teaching (recoded to seven years or fewer/eight years or more), gender (male/female), and multilingual (yes/no). In order to capture an accurate measure of the difference between groups, the "years teaching" responses were recoded in SPSS to two categories: seven years or fewer and eight years or more. The gender question had a number of response categories, but the responses happened to fall into two categories (male/female). For each of these tests, the null hypothesis was the following: There is no statistically significant variance between demographic groups when considering the concepts and indicators related to knowledge (refer to Figure 5). Because of there only being a small sample size for non-white survey respondents, statistical analyses were not run for the variable "ethnicity."

Educator Knowledge by Number of ELs. For the first one-way ANOVA, the relationship between the number of English learner students that an educator had had in the past three years was run for the concept and indicators related to knowledge.

Table 7

Descriptive Data for Knowledge Concept and Number of ELs

Variable	Number of Students Taught	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Indicator: Knowledge of Process	none	6	1.50	.45
	1-5	39	2.81	.80
	6-10	9	2.50	1.09
	10 or more	7	3.71	1.38
	Total	61	2.74	1.02
Indicator: Knowledge of Policy	none	6	1.33	.37
	1-5	39	2.17	.95
	6-10	9	2.26	.83
	10 or more	7	3.19	1.91
	Total	61	2.22	1.11
Concept: Knowledge	none	6	1.42	.13
	1-5	39	2.49	.81
	6-10	9	2.38	.85
	10 or more	7	3.45	1.59
	Total	61	2.48	.99

In this case, the null hypothesis (that there is no statistically significant variance between groups) was rejected because the p value was less than .05 ($p < .05$). The number of English learner students that an educator had in the past three years had a significant impact on the composite variables (indicators) knowledge of process $F(3, 57) = 6.81$, $p = .001$ and knowledge of policy $F(3,57) = 3.47$, $p = .02$ and the composite variable (concept) knowledge $F(3, 57) = 4.50$, $p = .002$.

Table 8

Summary of ANOVA for Knowledge Concept and Number of ELs

Variable		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Indicator: Knowledge of Process	Between Groups	16.57	3	5.52	6.81	.001
	Within Groups	46.24	57	.81		
	Total	62.80	60			
Indicator: Knowledge of Policy	Between Groups	11.42	3	3.81	3.47	.02
	Within Groups	62.56	57	1.10		
	Total	73.97	60			
Concept: Knowledge	Between Groups	13.50	3	4.50	5.60	.002
	Within Groups	45.78	57	.80		
	Total	59.28	60			

Educator Knowledge by Age. The remaining ANOVA test showed no statistical significance and therefore the null hypothesis was maintained for the variable "age" when it comes to the concept "Knowledge." The descriptive statistics for the concept of knowledge and age show that the means are quite similar across the different age groups, signifying that there was not much variance between the different age groups and their responses to questions that related to "Knowledge." For the purposes of statistical analysis, the age categories were condensed to three groups with larger age ranges than the original survey response options.

Table 9

Descriptive Data for Knowledge Concept and Age

Variable	Age	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Indicator: Knowledge of Process	18-34	14	3.04	1.20
	35-54	28	2.46	.89
	55-84	17	2.85	1.04
	Total	59	2.71	1.03
Indicator: Knowledge of Policy	18-34	14	2.60	1.35
	35-54	28	1.88	.77
	55-84	17	2.33	1.27
	Total	59	2.18	1.11
Concept: Knowledge	18-34	14	2.81	1.24
	35-54	28	2.17	.75
	55-84	17	2.59	1.06
	Total	59	2.45	.99

Table 10 shows the ANOVA summary for the concept of knowledge and age. In this case, the null hypothesis was maintained, as there is no significant difference between age groups and knowledge as reported by survey respondents.

Table 10

Summary of ANOVA for Knowledge Concept and Age

Variable		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Indicator: Knowledge of Process	Between Groups	3.52	2	1.76	1.71	.19
	Within Groups	57.58	56	1.03		
	Total	61.10	58			
Indicator: Knowledge of Policy	Between Groups	5.32	2	2.66	2.26	.11
	Within Groups	65.87	56	1.18		
	Total	71.18	58			
Concept: Knowledge	Between Groups	4.37	2	2.19	2.31	.11
	Within Groups	53.07	56	.95		
	Total	57.44	58			

Educator Knowledge by Years Teaching. The first t-test analyzed the relationship between the concept of knowledge and years teaching. The majority of respondents had been teaching for eight or more years.

Table 11

Descriptive Data for Knowledge Concept and Years Teaching

Variable	How many years have you been teaching?	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Indicator: Knowledge of Process	seven years or fewer	11	3.00	1.10	.33
	eight years or more	50	2.68	1.01	.14
Indicator: Knowledge of Policy	seven years or fewer	11	2.33	1.26	.38
	eight years or more	50	2.19	1.09	.15
Concept: Knowledge	seven years or fewer	11	2.67	1.08	.33
	eight years or more	50	2.44	.98	.14

In this case, the null hypothesis was maintained, as there is no significant difference between groups when looking at the number of years teaching and the concept of "Knowledge."

Table 12

T-test for Knowledge Concept and Years Teaching

Variable	T-test for Equality of Means		
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Indicator: Knowledge of Process	.94	59	.35
Indicator: Knowledge of Policy	.38	59	.71
Concept: Knowledge	.69	59	.49

Educator Knowledge by Gender. Descriptive statistics for the knowledge concept and related indicators and gender are displayed in Table 13.

Table 13

Descriptive Data for Knowledge Concept and Gender

Variable	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Indicator: Knowledge of Process	Male	13	2.77	1.17	.32
	Female	47	2.70	.99	.14
Indicator: Knowledge of Policy	Male	13	2.26	1.28	.35
	Female	47	2.19	1.08	.16
Concept: Knowledge	Male	13	2.51	1.16	.32
	Female	47	2.45	.96	.14

For gender, the null hypothesis was maintained: there was no statistically significant difference in knowledge for males and females (see Table 14).

Table 14

T-test for Knowledge Concept and Gender

Variable	T-test for Equality of Means		
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Indicator: Knowledge of Process	.21	58	.84
Indicator: Knowledge of Policy	.18	58	.85
Concept: Knowledge	.21	58	.83

Educator Knowledge by Multilingual. Descriptive statistics for the knowledge concept and related indicators and multilingual showed that the majority of respondents were not multilingual (83.6%) (see Table 15).

Table 15

Descriptive Statistics for Knowledge Concept and Multilingual

Variable	Multilingual?	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Indicator: District Process is Successful	Yes	10	2.15	.50	.16
	No	51	2.21	.59	.08
Indicator: Educator is Comfortable	Yes	10	2.53	.28	.09
	No	51	2.56	.54	.08
Concept: Knowledge	Yes	10	2.54	1.13	.36
	No	51	2.47	.98	.14

For multilingual, the null hypothesis was maintained: there was no statistically significant difference in knowledge for respondents who were multilingual and respondents who were not multilingual (see Table 16).

Table 16

T-test for Knowledge Concept and Multilingual

Variable	T-test for Equality of Means		
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Indicator: Knowledge of Process	.38	59	.71
Indicator: Knowledge of Policy	.18	58	.85
Indicator: Knowledge of Policy	.05	59	.96

Summary of Knowledge Analysis. In summary, the number of English learners an educator has had in the past three years was a statistically significant factor in an educator's knowledge of identification and placement. The more English learners that an educator had, the higher the mean score for the questions that addressed the knowledge concepts and indicators. This leads me to the preliminary conclusion that direct experience teaching English learners proves to be an important factor in educators' knowledge of English learner identification and placement.

Educator Attitude

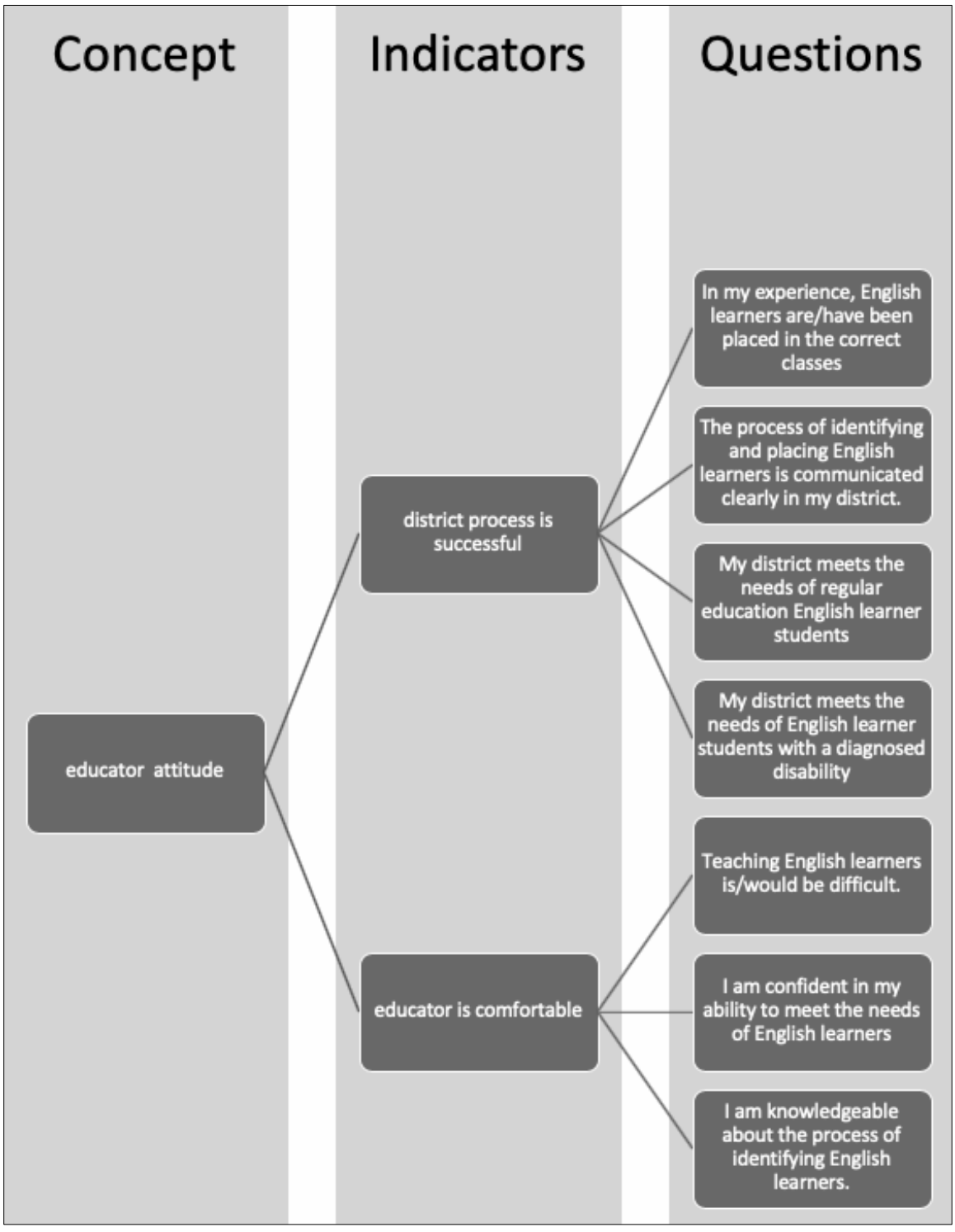
Similar to educator knowledge, the data on educator attitude was collected through the use of Likert scale questions that addressed the following concept and indicators that are linked to the research question being addressed (see survey questions and scales in Appendix C):

- What are educators' attitudes about the process of English learner identification and placement and how might an educator's background (demographic data) influence these attitudes?
    - concept: attitude
    - indicators: district process is successful, educator is comfortable

The concept and indicators were then measured by specific survey questions (see Figure 6). Just as with the concept of knowledge in the previous section, the concept attitude and the related indicators guided the quantitative analysis of survey items.

Figure 6

Concept of Educator Attitude



Following the same process as I did for educator knowledge, I recoded the variables into binary categories (agree/disagree and familiar/not familiar) in order to uncover broader trends in the data. Recoding the data into binary categories showed the following:

- the majority of respondents agreed with the following (% agreed):
    - teaching English learners is/would be difficult (75.4%)
    - I am knowledgeable about the process of identifying English learners (73.8%)
    - I am confident in my ability to meet the needs of English learners (62.3%)
- the majority of respondents disagreed with the following (% disagreed):
    - In my experience, English learners are/have been placed in the correct classes (52.5%)
    - The process of identifying and placing English learners is communicated clearly in my district (77.0%)
    - My district meets the needs of regular education English learner students (62.3%)
    - My district meets the needs of English learner students with a diagnosed disability (65.6%)

These findings show that educators in Jackson believe that district communication could be improved and that teaching English learners is/would be difficult. In addition, educators disagree on whether students are placed in correct classes, as the responses were pretty evenly split.

The Role of Background Variables in Attitude. These results led me to ask the following question of the data: Is there a statistically significant difference in the concept attitude when the following background variables are taken into account (age, gender, years teaching, subjects taught, ethnicity)? To answer this question, I ran one-way ANOVA tests in SPSS for the following variables that correspond to demographics that had answers that were *not* multiple response (answer categories did not overlap): number of ELs and age. For the variables that only had two response categories (or had responses that fell into two categories despite there being a number of options on the survey), I ran independent samples t-tests. These categories were years teaching, gender, and multilingual. For all of these, the ANOVA and t-tests, the null hypothesis was the following: There is no statistical significance between demographic groups when considering the concept of attitude and related indicators (refer to Figure 6). The results of these tests will be explored in depth below. Due to the small sample size, and, in particular, the small number of respondents who reported an ethnicity other than "white," statistical analysis beyond descriptive data of a respondent's ethnicity was not able to be run.

Educator Attitude by Number of ELs. For the first one-way ANOVA, the relationship between the number of English learner students that an educator had had in the past three years was analyzed.

Table 17

Descriptive Data for Attitude Concept and Number of ELs

Variable	Number of Students Taught	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Indicator: District Process is Successful	none	6	2.25	.63
	1-5	39	2.21	.57
	6-10	9	2.19	.39
	10 or more	7	2.11	.81
	Total	61	2.20	.57
Indicator: Educator is Comfortable	none	6	2.17	.78
	1-5	39	2.58	.43
	6-10	9	2.52	.38
	10 or more	7	2.76	.69
	Total	61	2.55	.51
Concept: Attitude	none	6	2.21	.48
	1-5	39	2.39	.45
	6-10	9	2.36	.34
	10 or more	7	2.43	.61
	Total	61	2.37	.45

In this case, the null hypothesis (that there is no statistically significant variance between groups) was maintained for the concept of attitude, as the *p* value was greater than .05 for the concepts and indicators tested.

Table 18

Summary of ANOVA for Attitude Concept and Number of ELs

Variable		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Indicator: District Process is Successful	Between Groups	.08	3	.02	.07	.97
	Within Groups	19.44	57	.34		
	Total	19.51	60			
Indicator: Educator is Comfortable	Between Groups	1.24	3	.41	1.68	.18
	Within Groups	14.06	57	.25		
	Total	15.31	60			
Concept: Attitude	Between Groups	.21	3	.07	.33	.80
	Within Groups	11.98	57	.21		
	Total	12.19	60			

For a number of ELs, though there was not statistically significant variance, some of the data points were helpful in analysis. In general, the groups of educators who responded that the number of ELs they had had were "none" and "10 or more" showed higher standard deviations and therefore there is some connection between number of ELs and attitude, even though it is not statistically significant.

Educator Attitude by Age. Next, a one-way ANOVA was run for the attitude concept and age. As expected, the demographic data shows that most educators fell into the middle categories as this matches the demographics of the district (DESE, 2017d).

Table 19

Descriptive Data for Attitude Concept and Age

Variable	Age	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Indicator: District Process is Successful	18-34	14	2.25	.52
	35-54	28	2.22	.53
	55-84	17	2.24	.62
	Total	59	2.23	.54
Indicator: Teacher is Comfortable	18-34	14	2.55	.52
	35-54	28	2.51	.45
	55-84	17	2.55	.59
	Total	59	2.53	.50
Concept: Attitude	18-34	14	2.40	.46
	35-54	28	2.37	.44
	55-84	17	2.39	.50
	Total	59	2.38	.46

The age of the respondent did not have a statistically significant impact on the concept of attitude and related indicators. In this case, the null hypothesis (that there was no statistically significant variation in attitude between groups) was maintained.

Table 20

Summary of ANOVA for Attitude Concept and Age

Variable		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Indicator: District Process is Successful	Between Groups	.01	2	.00	.01	.99
	Within Groups	17.10	56	.30		
	Total	17.11	58			
Indicator: Teacher is Comfortable	Between Groups	.02	2	.01	.04	.96
	Within Groups	14.45	56	.26		
	Total	14.47	58			
Concept: Attitude	Between Groups	.01	2	.01	.03	.97
	Within Groups	12.07	56	.21		
	Total	12.08	58			

Educator Attitude by Years Teaching. The next variable tested was years teaching. An overwhelming majority of respondents reported that they have taught for eight or more years (82.0%).

Table 21

Descriptive Data for Attitude Concept and Years Teaching

Variable	How many years have you been teaching?	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Indicator: District Process is Successful	seven years or fewer	11	2.32	.50	.15
	eight years or more	50	2.17	.59	.08
Indicator: Teacher is Comfortable	seven years or fewer	11	2.45	.52	.16
	eight years or more	50	2.57	.50	.07
Concept: Attitude	seven years or fewer	11	2.39	.45	.13
	eight years or more	50	2.37	.46	.06

This t-test showed that there was not statistically significant variation between groups when considering the number of years someone has worked as an educator. Therefore, in this case, the null hypothesis (that there was no statistically significant variation between groups) was maintained.

Table 22

T-test for Attitude Concept and Years Teaching

Variable	T-test for Equality of Means		
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Indicator: District Process is Successful	.78	59	.44
Indicator: Teacher is Comfortable	-.70	59	.49
Concept: Attitude	.10	59	.92

Educator Attitude by Gender. Next, an independent samples t-test was conducted to compare the different indicators and concepts in males and females.

Table 23

Descriptive Data for Attitude Concept and Gender

Variable	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Indicator: District Process is Successful	Male	13	2.44	.51	.14
	Female	47	2.15	.56	.08
Indicator: Educator is Comfortable	Male	13	2.49	.55	.15
	Female	47	2.56	.50	.07
Concept: Attitude	Male	13	2.46	.44	.12
	Female	47	2.35	.46	.07

For this variable, the null hypothesis was maintained: there was no statistically significant difference in attitude toward English learners for males and females.

Table 24

T-test for Attitude Concept and Gender

Variable	t-test for Equality of Means		
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Indicator: District Process is Successful	1.69	58	.10
Indicator: Teacher is Comfortable	-.70	59	.49
Indicator: Educator is Comfortable	-.46	58	.65

Educator Attitude by Multilingual. The next quantitative test was an independent samples t-test for the concept of attitude and whether or not an educator reported him/herself as multilingual. For this question, the majority (83.6%) responded that they were not multilingual.

Table 25

Descriptive Statistics for Attitude Concept and Multilingual

Variable	Multilingual?	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Indicator: District Process is Successful	Yes	10	2.15	.50	.16
	No	51	2.21	.59	.08
Indicator: Educator is Comfortable	Yes	10	2.53	.28	.09
	No	51	2.56	.54	.08
Concept: Attitude	Yes	10	2.34	.32	.10
	No	51	2.38	.47	.07

The independent samples t-test showed that the null hypothesis was maintained: there was no statistically significant difference in attitude toward English learners multilingual/not multilingual respondents.

Table 26

T-test for Attitude Concept and Multilingual

Variable	T-test for Equality of Means		
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Indicator: District Process is Successful	-.28	59	.78
Indicator: Teacher is Comfortable	-.70	59	.49
Indicator: Educator is Comfortable	-.13	59	.90

Summary of Attitude Analysis. In summary, none of the tested demographic variables showed a statistically significant difference in educator attitude. Though these findings were not quite as expected, the interviews helped to more accurately capture and explain the differences in attitude among the educators surveyed. These findings will be integrated in Chapter 5.

Analysis of Open Response Questions

Though the open response question responses from the survey were short, it was important to include them in the analysis in order to inform the qualitative data collection and analysis. The two open response questions were as follows:

- Is there anything else about English learner identification and/or placement in your school/district that you would like to share?
- Have you participated in professional development related to English learners? If so, please explain what types of professional development.

The opened ended comment question elicited 20 responses, while the question about professional development elicited 48 responses (note that the "no" or "N/A" answers were counted differently because a negative response about the professional development meant

that the respondent had not participated in professional development, while a negative response on the other question meant that they did not have anything to share). Of the 48 responses to the PD question, 26 (54.1%) mentioned the SEI RETELL course as their additional PD, and 22 of the 48 (45.8%) responses mentioned the 5 part series that the district offered and/or other 15 PDP (professional development point) courses that are required by the state Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) for recertification for many educators. A number of educators also noted that they had participated in both the 15 PDP course (also referred to in interviews and survey data as the "5 Part Series") and the SEI/RETELL course.

The responses to the "anything else?" question were quite varied. One respondent was concerned about the lack of support at the PreK level (which, based on current policy, is not mandatory but recommended; DESE, 2019a). Three of the responses addressed the role of the ESL teacher and the difficulties associated with scheduling instruction of English learners. The biggest finding for this open response question was the number of responses that had to do with educator attitude. Concerns included not knowing who ELs are in one's classroom/issues with communication, no clear "chain of command" when it comes to ELs, and a lack of a clear process (these responses came from 4 respondents). Other concerns were about professional development and wanting the content of the professional development to be useful in the classroom, especially in the high school classroom.

All responses to the professional development question (n = 23) mentioned either the "5 Part Series" or the RETELL Course (SEI endorsement). The interview responses were consistent with this finding as well. These are the two main ways that district personnel are formally learning about English learner identification and placement (along with strategies,

etc.). These responses lead me to question whether there should be more options for EL-related professional development.

Using the online software TagCrowd (https://tagcrowd.com/#tagcloud) I created a word cloud to analyze frequency of specific words used in the responses. The words that stood out as important to the study are "resources", "difficult", and "schedule" (other high frequency words were to be expected- words like student, English, etc.). Interestingly, two of the responses that included the word difficult were in regard to sub-populations of English learners, more specifically METCO[5] students and English Learner students with disabilities. Other than these major themes, respondents for the most part had constructive criticism or ideas for improving the program. Only one respondent said that he/she felt comfortable with meeting the needs of English learners, and he/she attributed that comfort and confidence with his/her training as a special education teacher.

Qualitative Data and Analysis

As discussed in Chapter 3, this phase of the study consisted of interviews of educators in the Jackson Public Schools (N = 15). Interview questions were shaped by survey findings and interviews. After transcribing the interviews, I used the transcriptions as data for coding with the software Dedoose, which supports the analysis of text, audio, and video. Coding based on the concepts of knowledge and attitude yielded a number of themes and sub-themes that guided the analysis of the interviews. Interview data was then analyzed through the lens of the theoretical framework and the findings of the literature review. The sections that

[5] METCO, or the **Met**ropolitan **Co**uncil for Educational Opportunity, is a "voluntary school integration program" that has placed students of color from the Boston Public Schools in predominantly White districts since 1966 for the purpose of "creating the opportunity for students to experience the advantages of learning in a racially diverse setting" (METCO, 2019).

follow present and analyze the findings from the two stages of coding (Saldana, 2015). The first cycle of coding was structural and was based on the research questions (as explained in Chapter 3). These codes were for the concept of knowledge and the concept of attitude. For my second cycle of coding, I utilized "pattern coding" and categorized my coded data.

Interview Participants

For the purposes of context, each interviewee was given a pseudonym as shown in Table 27, and some basic demographic data is shared. In order to integrate this data with the data from the survey, the response categories generally mirror the response categories from similar demographic questions in the survey. The survey itself was anonymous and I removed any identifying information from responses. Therefore, demographic data for the interviewees was taken from the interview itself and not from the survey.

Table 27

Interviewee Data and Pseudonyms

Name	Gender	Years Teaching	Grade Level	Role/ Department	Subject(s) Taught
Rose	female	8+ years	5-8	teacher	Math, Science
Ella	female	8+ years	9-12+	SAC	School Adjustment Counselor
Emily	female	4-7 years	K-4	teacher	Early Childhood
Nora	female	8+ years	5-8	teacher	Math
Heather	female	-	9-12+	admin	Special Education Coordinator
Arlene	female	8+ years	9-12+	SPED	Math
Nancy	female	4-7 years	5-8	teacher	Math
Amanda	female	8+ years	5-8	teacher	English, Social Studies
Annie	female	8+ years	9-12+	teacher	Health
Veronica	female	8+ years	5-8	SPED	Special Education
Nicole	female	8+ years	9-12+	ISP	Instructional Support Personnel
Tania	female	8+ years	9-12+	teacher	World Language
Neal	male	8+ years	9-12+	guidance	Guidance Counselor
Yvette	female	8+ years	5-8	teacher	Math, Science
Naomi	female	4-7 years	5-8	teacher	English

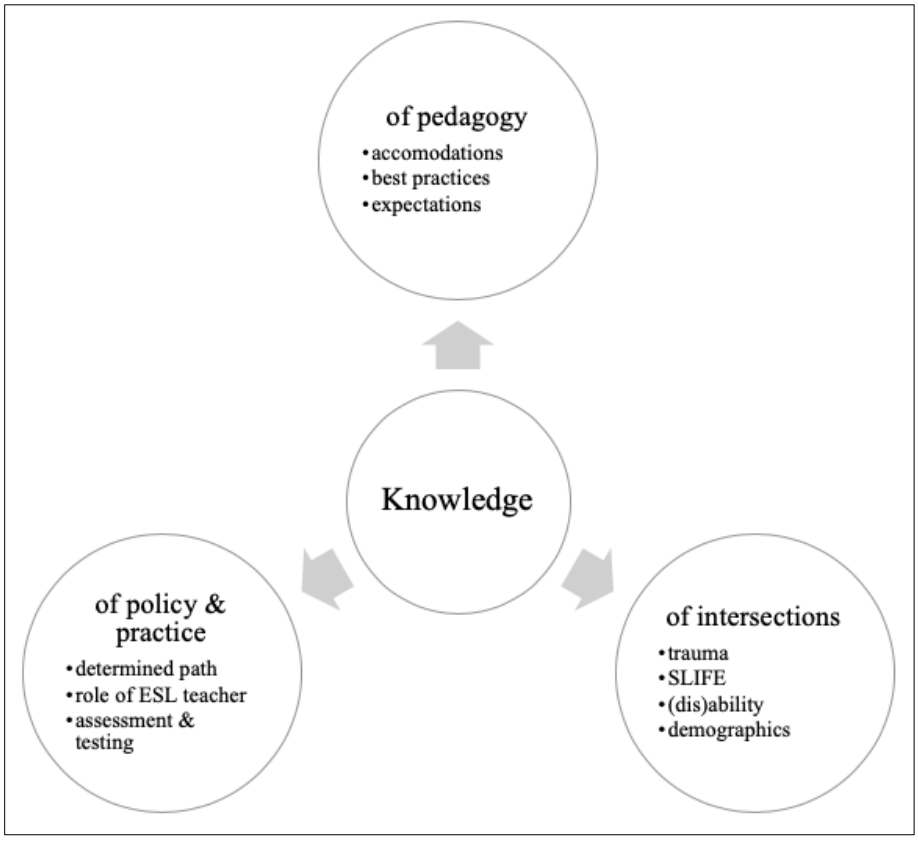
Qualitative Analysis of Knowledge Concept

For the concept of knowledge, the themes that stood out are knowledge of pedagogy, knowledge of intersections, and knowledge of policy and practice. These themes are shown in Figure 7. The figure shows a hierarchy that helps to explain the relationship between the concept, the themes, and the sub-themes. The sub-themes were frequently mentioned phrases

or ideas that served as a guide to determine what items were coded with the particular themes. The process of arriving at these codes is explained above and also in Chapter 3.

Figure 7

Concept, Themes, and Sub-Themes for Knowledge Concept



Findings. A number of the interview questions probed at the knowledge that respondents had about the process of English learner identification and placement. As with any interview, respondents shared what they knew to be true about their own experiences and/or what they have heard from other educators. The interviews allowed me to gain insight into the scope of the interviewees' knowledge about EL identification and placement. When

looking closely at the concept of knowledge in the interview data, there were three major themes that stood out: pedagogy, intersections, and policy and practice.

Pedagogy Theme. Discussion of pedagogy is an important window into an educator's knowledge of English learner identification and placement, as it touches on arguably the most important aspect of an educator's role, which is the teaching itself. In this study, pedagogy was discussed through three sub-themes: accommodations, best practices, and expectations.

Accommodations for English learners are an important way to ensure that they are accessing the same curriculum as their peers. Though occasionally the word "modification" is used (and one interviewee did use the word), the words "accommodation" or "differentiation" are preferred when discussing the pedagogical needs of English learners as they imply that students are still required to meet the standards set by the state.[6] Regardless of the term used, an educator's knowledge of how to meet the needs of English learners is an indicator of what is being done to support English learners who are placed in their classrooms or on their caseloads.

Emily, an elementary school teacher, explained the way that she makes accommodations for her English learners by saying the following:

> [I] differentiate[s] everything, so when it comes to math for example, I'll have bullets for 'this is what my on level students are going to do, my low level, my high level' and then I always meet with my low level students in a smaller group, and all of my ELs are in that group, but then I differentiate for them a little bit more, like if they

[6] Modifications can be used for students with an Individualized Education Program (IEP) who may not be able to meet state standards due to his/her disability. See https://www.colorincolorado.org/article/differentiated-instruction-english-language-learners for more information on modifications and accommodations.

need templates, or sentence frames, or things like that, I make sure that they have that extra piece. (Emily, K-4 teacher, interview, November 2019)

Interestingly, the secondary educators were more skeptical about the use of similar strategies because they felt that the content that they teach was far too abstract to put into pictures or sentence frames. The skepticism from those educators, though, demonstrated that they were indeed knowledgeable about strategies used to meet the needs of English learners, and the quotes (such as "A lot of the advice that I get is like "well what can you give them for pictures" and there are only so many things that I feel like I can break down into pictures and have it make sense" [Naomi, 5-8 English teacher, interview, February 2020]."") were more indicative of attitude rather than knowledge.

One middle school educator shared that she used technology and online resources to differentiate instruction, saying, "we do use, or this year at least we started using Newsela a lot because you can change the reading level of that. So that's been really helpful for me so at least I can feel like I'm giving students the same idea as far as the material goes, but I'm able to bring it down to a reading level that they're more capable of understanding" (Naomi, 5-8 English teacher, interview, February 2020). This shows an understanding of how to differentiate instruction without modifying the curriculum.

Though many interviewees expressed the difficult aspects of identification and placement, most also offered anecdotal evidence of best practices and/or ideas for improving the process of English learner identification and placement and improving outcomes for English learners in the Jackson Schools. One such example was a similar idea that educators in two different schools had: having a system in place for school personnel and the registering student and his/her family to meet together to share information back and forth.

Interestingly, one of the educators, Yvette, a middle school math and science teacher, focused on how this would be helpful for families, especially with supporting the process of filling out paperwork in an unfamiliar language, or learning about services offered in the district such as free and reduced lunch and transportation/bussing. Her idea is as follows:

> We had always thought there should be like an intake process, you know, like in the district, there should be some kind of a formal process where when an ELL student is coming into the district or even transitioning, even like for Galvin, transitioning from the elementary to the middle school, some type of process where someone can sit with the student and the parents, and if they don't speak English, there should be a translator available, so that, and just, make sure that information is communicated that they need to know like how to apply for the free and reduced lunch, or how to get bussing. All the things like that a lot of parents can just read on the website or read on the district website or read communication emails that some out like these parents don't necessarily have the ability to do that like I always felt like there should be a formal process, like before they came in, or when they were transitioning, it should be like a requirement that they come in with their parents and someone gives that information or makes sure they understand that information...like what happens if there's a snow day, you know, like because a lot of that information they don't get, the kids come early, like when there's a delayed opening, those kids show up because that communication was never received. And probably because of the language barrier. Things like that, like we always felt there should be a formal process, intake process, so that they make sure that the parents were given the information they need. Or like a mentor teacher to contact or someone, a point person that any time they

needed information they could go to. And that person could get them the information. (Yvette, 5-8 Math and Science teacher, interview, February 2020)

The other educator who mentioned a meeting of this type was Neal, a guidance counselor in the high school. He focused on the information that such a meeting would give to the educators and other school staff, therefore giving them the information needed to better meet the needs of the student. His idea was to have students give a presentation where they "explain their background, getting more information regarding each student- lives they're living, where they're coming from, what their goals and fears and hopes are" (Neal, 9-12+ Guidance Counselor, interview, December 2019). Examples of relevant information from the family and/or student could be transcripts, information about the student's life and/or schooling before arriving in Jackson, the student's goals for life/career, and the student's likes, dislikes, and hobbies. Other interviewees described how communication is now (difficulty obtaining interpreters and/or translators, difficulty scheduling meetings with families, etc.), so having a process in place would interrupt the status quo and empower educators and, more importantly, the students and their families.

Educators expressed their knowledge of policy and practice through a desire to identify and share best practices among colleagues. At least two interviewees mentioned this explicitly, while others made comments that were along these same lines. Neal said that some of the teachers in his school were "really adept at welcoming students in" and therefore he thought it would be helpful to have them "share best practices more openly" (Neal, 9-12+ Guidance Counselor, interview, December 2019). Ella, a former guidance counselor, had a similar idea, saying that a teacher in her building was "doing some really cool things" so she told another teacher that "it would be good if you would talk to her because she's, whatever

she's doing, is really helping this student" (Ella, 9-12+ School Adjustment Counselor, interview, November 2019). One educator, Annie, a high school Health teacher, even said that she wanted to ask EL students which educators are able to reach them with their pedagogy, with the goal of having the educators then share with their colleagues. She asked the ESL teacher to "ask the students in [her] program to tell [her team of teachers] what teachers are really meeting their needs" (Annie, 9-12+ Health teacher, interview, December 2019).

Three interviewees expressed concern over the difficulties in determining what their expectations should be of English learner students; of wanting to have high but realistic expectations of their students. Nancy, a middle school math teacher, said the following:

> My biggest thing is that mixed messages about what am I supposed to be doing, how much am I supposed to be modifying and changing, and so I guess that's really not something to share with you, but just more a question that I have for you, like what is best practice? Because I want to make sure that I'm doing what I can for my little friends in front of me. (Nancy, 5-8 Math teacher, interview, December 2019)

Another middle school Math teacher, Nora, has a similar concern because she was "second guessing [herself] a lot with holding [ELs] to the same academic standard with altering the language" (Nora, 5-8 Math teacher, interview, November 2019). Naomi, a middle school English teacher, had concerns about how expectations affect both teacher and students, saying:

> I get different answers as to what our responsibilities are, what these students are supposed to be doing at specific times, what I should be expecting of them. And so, it

> can make everything really frustrating for the teachers, but I can imagine also really frustrating for the students. (Naomi, 5-8 English teacher, interview, Feb. 2020)

Intersections Theme. The theories that frame this study are intersectionality, critical constructivism, and critical pedagogy. In an effort to describe English learner identification and placement, respondents frequently referred to different intersections that exist within the English learner population. The main intersections (themes) that came up in the interviews were traumatic experiences, prior schooling, students with disabilities (SWDs), and demographic information (age, socioeconomic status [SES], etc.). When recalling particular students, interviewees mentioned traumatic experiences that they were aware of students experiencing such as witnessing bombings, separation from family, and being detained at the U.S./Mexico border. Trauma is important to keep in mind when helping any student get what he or she needs, both for social-emotional health and academic success. Nora, a middle school Math teacher, had concerns about what her expectations should be for students who are not only English learners, but have also lived through trauma. She said,

> [The] student who struggles with language also has a background of trauma, so she doodles a lot during class, and I think it's therapeutic for her so I let it happen a lot of the time, but I'm struggling with what she actually can achieve if she is attentive and I'm supporting her vs. what she's just able to retain given that she's got a lot of other thoughts in her head. (Nora, 5-8 Math teacher, interview, November 2019)

Similarly, prior schooling was mentioned when discussing trauma, as the two often coincide. As noted previously, the subgroup of students who have gaps in prior schooling are called SLIFE (students with limited or interrupted prior schooling). This pertains to the placement and program because none of the interviewees had received this information from

the district or ESL teachers, rather they had found out from the student him/herself or from the student's family. Veronica, a middle school special education teacher, described the process that she went through to give an EL student a chance at staying in the district rather than being placed in a special education school. She said,

> I felt that maybe he exhibited all those behaviors and stuff like that because of his traumatic background, and I ended up being correct. He could speak great English, he couldn't read or write it, he was the one that was caught at the border, it's a real sad story, caught at the border and they taught him great English, but he really didn't get any school, so he came to me at kindergarten level. (Veronica, 5-8 Special Education teacher, interview, December 2019)

Arlene, a high school special education math teacher, shared this anecdote:

> This year we have a student who has no English knowledge and also has minimal math skills, I actually am trying, still have yet to find a point of entry with him, because he's been out of school for so long, he's a 17-year-old freshman from Guatemala. And he finished 6th grade in Guatemala, now he's in 9th grade in the United States, so yeah, it's a…. even with all of the special education students in there, who have significant disabilities, this is entirely different. (Arlene, 9-12+ SPED Math teacher, interview, December 2019)

English learners with disabilities (EL/SWD) was another intersection that was frequently mentioned in interviews. Identification and placement of EL/SWDs is extremely difficult because the assessments that designate a student as an EL or SWD are not designed to look at both language and ability. According to interviewees, there are some students in the district that are EL/SWDs, but, for the most part, it is too difficult to determine whether a

student is both an EL and a SWD and so educators are in the difficult position of trying to meet the needs of a student whose needs are not fully known. When asked about whether there are students in her classes that are designated as EL and SWD, Nicole, a high school ISP said, "we can't really tell" (Nicole, 9-12+ ISP, interview, December 2019). When describing her English learner students, Nora, a middle school math teacher said "one of them is possibly also special ed, undiagnosed, so that's been a huge challenge because I have felt like, even if the test was user friendly for language purposes, he was still struggling to achieve" (Nora, 5-8 Math teacher, interview, November 2019. Heather, a special education administrator, confirmed that there are a handful of students she knows of who have both a special education and English learner designation. When asked to elaborate on this process, she shared the following:

> I'm hoping to have some of those conversations and sit down in the near future just because of [sic] the eligibility for ESL students is pretty tricky, where we're not necessarily sure if it's due to the limited English exposure, or really a skill deficit. And I think that different people can have different opinions about that based upon where they're coming from. For me, just trying to make sure that looking at a student's presentation comprehensively but then also in the other side of it, having general ed in and all team members understand the trajectory of English Language learning in general, just how much time is needed to acquire academic skill, is important to remember when a) Making a recommendation for a student to be evaluated and b) When we're discussing eligibility. So, for me, just trying to manage all of those kinds of perspectives and trying to make the best decision to look at what's necessary for the student. I don't know that I have a good answer, but I know

it's definitely something that needs a point of discussion, in whatever district you're in. (Heather, 9-12 Special Education administrator, interview, December 2019)

This determination can also be complicated by SLIFE; as a student who has had gaps in their schooling may present as a student with a disability, when really, they have not yet had the opportunity to learn.

Demographic data was also mentioned by interviewees, as placement in school is often determined by age. For students who have had gaps in schooling, this presents a particular challenge- especially for secondary students. One educator mentioned that there is a freshman health course that is required for graduation, and so if an older student registers for school and has not taken an equivalent course elsewhere, she or he is placed into the health course with significantly younger students (Annie, 9-12+ Health teacher, interview, December 2019). Inversely, students registering for school who speak a language that is offered by the foreign language department are often placed into a higher level language course, with the idea being that they will at least have one course that they can be successful in (Ella, 9-12+ School Adjustment Counselor, interview, November 2019). This leads to young high school students being placed with much older students. To complicate matters further, students will often have high speaking and listening ability in their native language, but do not have a strong background in reading and writing due to gaps in schooling, low quality schooling, trauma, etc. Interviewees from various departments (foreign language, guidance, special education) made it clear that this is a common situation that is difficult for all parties involved, but particularly difficult for the student.

Educators from the middle school and high school also commented on factors such as socio-economic status (SES) that impede students from accessing support that would help

them to make academic gains. Two interviewees mentioned that high school students have jobs that prevent them from doing homework or staying after school to get extra help. Arlene, a special education Math teacher said of her English learners, "they're working a ton, they're all working" (Arlene, 9-12+ SPED Math teacher, interview, December 2019). Another educator, Nicole, a high school ISP, said that one of her students had to send money back to his/her home country (Nicole, 9-12+ ISP, interview, December 2019). Arlene also mentioned that students are not able to stay after school because of transportation (Arlene, 9-12+ SPED Math teacher, interview, December 2019), which also ties back to SES for many of the students in Jackson. Jackson has some public transportation, but it is not a reliable means of transport for many students and it also does not reach all of the neighborhoods in the town. The lack of opportunity for extra support also comes from the scheduling difficulties that sometimes prevent students from having a free period in which to seek extra help from their teacher(s). Findings about scheduling are discussed at length in the section that addresses the concept of attitude below.

Policy and Practice Theme. Interviewees reported that there was a determined "path" that students took: this "path" was explained in one of two ways. The first was that students, especially in the high school, went through a predetermined set of courses regardless of the student's ability, desired career, etc. Neal, a secondary level guidance counselor shared that "students kind of go on the same path that every student goes through, and we could do a better job of really getting a true understanding of their life outside of school and goals going forward" (Neal, 9-12+ guidance counselor, interview, December 2019). The other path that was explained was that which students follow when they are designated as an English learner—they are placed with specific classroom teachers and/or with specific teams of

teachers. When asked for recommendations on other interviewees, Amanda, a middle school teacher recommended a colleague and explained that "she tends to get a lot of them" ("them" referring to ELs; Amanda, 5-8 English and Social Studies teacher, interview, December 2019), Interviewees explained that at first these teams were the ones that had the most classroom teachers who were qualified to teach English learners because they had taken a course or a test that had led to a special endorsement called the SEI endorsement. Nancy, a middle school math teacher, shared the following about students being placed with certain teachers because of the endorsement:

> I believe that is what happens, because I think that not all of the teachers in the building necessarily have that SEI endorsement, and so, like I know all four of the teachers on my 8th grade team do have it, and so I think that's why we end up getting any students that would be in the ESL program. (Nancy, 5-8 Math teacher, interview, December 2019)

Over time, more and more teachers in the state (and therefore in Jackson) became endorsed. It seems that in Jackson, however, English learner students continued to be placed with the same teachers (this finding was less apparent at the elementary level, but very present in the middle and high school interviews). Nora, a middle school math teacher, said, "it's usually [this team of teacher], to [this team], to [this team]- I played it off as we were the ones who got certified first, and then it just became "that's where they go" (Nora, 5-8 Math teacher, interview, November 2019). Additionally, the teachers and teams were most often those that had extra support from special education staff. When English learner students are placed in co-taught special education classes, they are able to receive extra support from a

paraprofessional and special education teacher, but it also means that they are placed in lower level classes regardless of the student's ability.

Interviewees frequently mentioned the role of the ESL teacher (n = 8). At least one educator mentioned that their EL students did not receive any direct instruction. The role of the ESL teacher is to provide direction instruction in the English language but anecdotally this did not seem to be the norm in Jackson over the past number of years. Nora, a middle school math teacher, explained how the role of the ESL teacher is often misunderstood or even not performed correctly, saying,

> I also would love to see her describe what her class looks like so that other teachers know that it's not just homework support anymore. I do feel like we've had a lot of requests to- "can you help them study for this test" and she's getting frustrated because, as a good ESL teacher, she knows that's not her primary role, but she is struggling with the teachers' expectations because that's all we've known for a while. (Nora, 5-8 Math teacher, interview, November 2019)

There has been some turnover in the district as far as the ESL positions, so that is a possible explanation, though the role of the ESL teacher is clearly defined in policy. Yvette, a middle school Math and Science teacher, described the confusion about the ESL teacher's role saying "one person does it one way, the next person comes and does it a different way. So, it's a little difficult" (Yvette, 5-8 Math and Science teacher, interview, February 2020). As mentioned in chapter 2, ESL is the "systematic, explicit, and sustained language instruction" that "prepares students for general education by focusing on academic language" and so this is what all ESL teachers should be providing to English learner students in Jackson (DESE,

2019a, p. 4). In describing her interactions with the building ESL teacher, Emily, an elementary school teacher shared this description of her experiences:

> She will come pick them up for 40 minutes four times a week and then will push in for 10 minutes on one day, and then we'll touch base as needed. She's really quick to respond but I just feel like we're on two different...I don't really know what she's teaching, I've told her what I'm teaching, and gave her some ideas but it doesn't seem to be matching what she's doing, so I'm just doing the best I can. (Emily, K-4 teacher, interview, November 2019)

Arlene, a high school special education math teacher shared that her experience was that her students' EL class was "devoted to their learning English" but that "in the past it's also been a time when they can work on their academic skills" (Arlene, 9-12+ SPED Math teacher, interview, December 2019).

As for EL assessment, interviewees were familiar with the identification and progress testing called WIDA, but only knew it by name. A number of interviewees did have knowledge of the different proficiency levels that students fall into based on assessment but had little understanding of the assessment itself. Heather, a high school special education teacher shared the process that she has experienced with trying to integrate WIDA testing into students' IEPs saying,

> Yes, in my previous district, but just have not encountered it yet for this placement, in our previous district what we were looking to do is put some of those accommodations that are applicable for the ACCESS the WIDA testing into students' IEPs so that ultimately all team members were aware of what accommodations are

> required for students during administration of those exams. (Heather, 9-12 Special Education administrator, interview, December 2019)

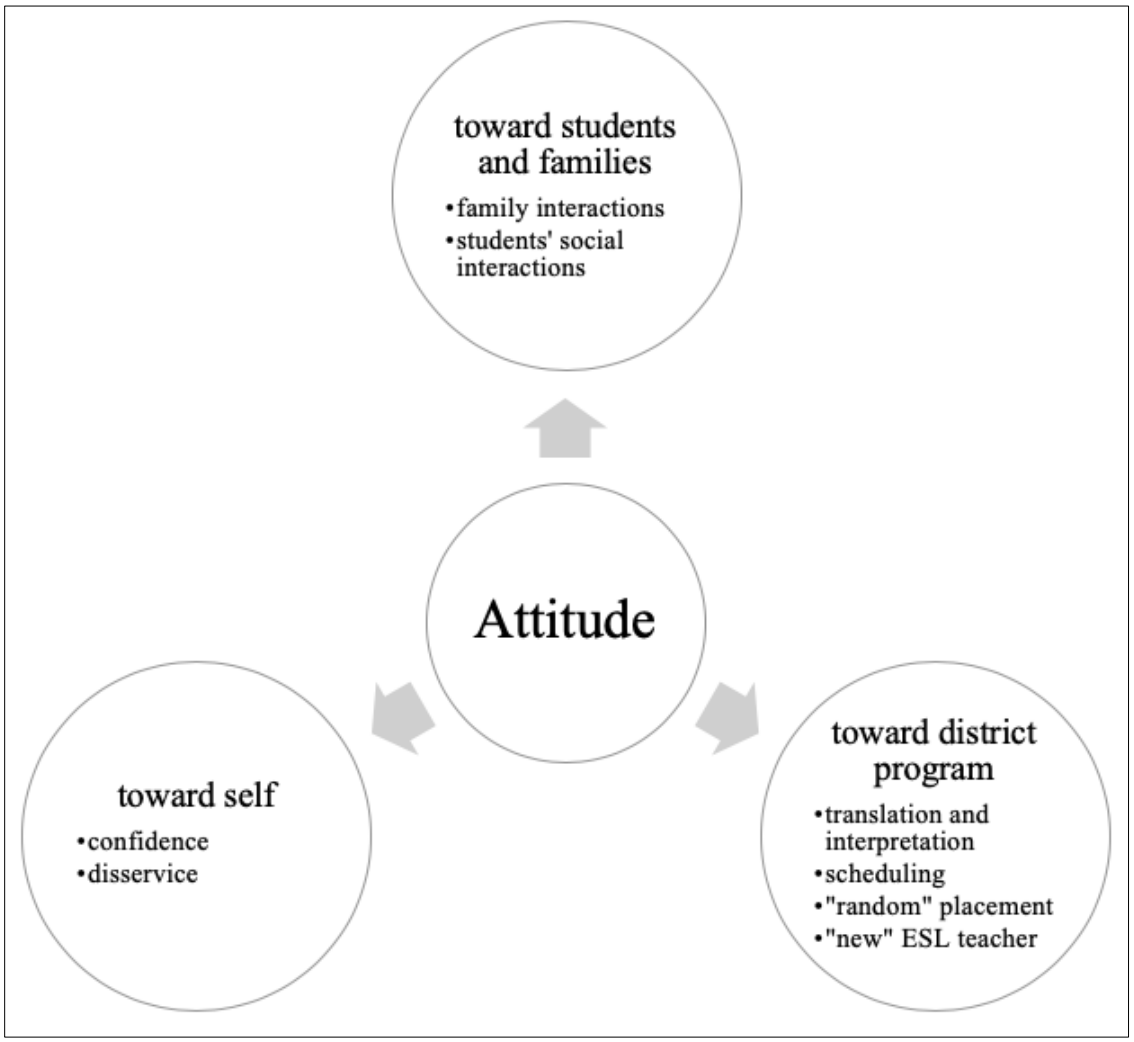
Similarly, Arlene, a high school special education Math teacher, said that in the past she had to "inform the MCAS administrator here on what EL students were allowed to have for MCAS" (Arlene, 9-12+ SPED Math teacher, interview, December 2019). MCAS (Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System) is the high stakes test that determines graduation eligibility, among other things, and so it is imperative for EL students to receive the support that is granted to them through the testing administration policy.

Qualitative Analysis of Attitude Concept

For the concept of attitude, the themes that stood out in the coding process are shown in Figure 8. The figure shows a hierarchy that helps to explain the concepts, themes, and sub-themes. The themes were attitude toward students and families, attitude toward self, and attitude toward the district program. These codes came from the process of coding described in the previous section and also in Chapter 3.

Figure 8

Concept, Themes, and Sub-Themes for Attitude Concept



Findings. In reviewing the interview transcripts, it became clear that educator attitude centered around three themes: attitude toward students and families, attitude toward self (as an educator), and attitude toward the district program.

Students and Families Theme. A number of educators lamented the fact that English learner students do not have others advocating for them. Educators explained that no one is checking to see what they are teaching the students, and parents of English learners most often do not have the language (or social capital) to question the education that their child is receiving. Veronica, a veteran special education teacher at the middle school, said of one student's family,

> When I have [sic] his parents in I noticed they, he speaks like they do which is not, do you know what I mean, they speak ok to get by...but he doesn't speak in complete sentences like us, he talks, it's broken English. And that's how his parents talk. (Veronica, 5-8 Special Education teacher, interview, December 2019)

Though the way she spoke about this family would not be considered "politically correct," her attitude towards the child's family was still positive. Another veteran middle school teacher shared this story in response to the question of whether having English learners in her classroom created additional work, saying,

> So yes, it's a lot of work. A lot of extra work, but it works out obviously. And then it has to do with parent support. We just had parent conferences last night, and the little girl that I'm talking about, the father came, he spoke pretty good English, and the mother didn't speak anything. And they were excellent. They were really supportive, and he was translating to her. And I gained a lot of insight too. Like, with the math, she gets confused and it was because of plus and times and minus, you know, some of the vocabulary. You have to, and we straightened that out with Spanish and how it's different in English. And that was one of the problems. (Rose, 5-8 Math and Science teacher, interview, November 2019)

Again, one could pick apart the subtext of a quote like this, and honestly doing so could be a worthwhile exercise in uncovering conscious and unconscious bias. But it was heartening to learn that the educators were making the effort to meet with parents of English learners, despite there being barriers to such meetings (language, transportation, etc.). Overall it seemed that educators had an overall positive attitude towards students and families other than the concern that parents and/or guardians did not (or could not) advocate for the students in their families.

However, these (legitimate) complaints about advocacy were accompanied by a number of anecdotal stories of how different educators in the district have stepped up to advocate for English learner students whether it is asking an educator in the building to translate or interpret when they're in a pinch or spending extra time with particular students in class in order to help them with academic skills or concepts that they are struggling with. Nicole, a high school ISP (instructional support personnel) told of watching a teacher advocate for a student with a bad toothache. The advocating teacher worked with the school nurse and local dentists to find a place the student could be treated with the state health insurance plan—and \\ she even called the student an Uber to get to his appointment (Nicole, 9-12+ ISP, interview, December 2019). Another educator worked diligently to learn about a child's background so that she could help the whole family and not just the student (Veronica, 5-8 Special Education teacher, interview, December 2019).

Educators' attitudes towards the students themselves definitely differed greatly. When talking about placement of students with particular teams (quoted above in the knowledge section), Nora, a middle school math teacher, said that placement is "not fair. Just because of the associated workload and accommodations that go with it. Obviously, you know what I

mean, don't get me wrong, we love to have them" (Nora, 5-8 Math teacher, interview, November 2019). Annie, a high school health teacher, shared concerns about not knowing which students are English Learners at the beginning of the school year, as there was no defined process that she knew of. She said,

> That's a hard pill to swallow because you try to have any empathy and you are like, I cannot believe this- you can't figure it out until they can't understand you, or something, so...it's just a little bizarre to me that we would not get notification (Annie, 9-12+ Health teacher, interview, December 2019)

Another theme found in educators' attitudes that stood out in the interviews is groupings of students and socialization (often by race and/or language). Multiple educators expressed concern for students not forming deep friendships, or not forming friendships at all with students outside their "group." Students are often placed with same-language peers or other EL students. Nancy, a middle school math teacher, shared the following anecdote about placing students together:

> We had two students, one of them is new this year, like new to the district, and I think he's [like] a level 2… he's friendly with a little guy who is also fairly new to the district, so I know a homeroom switch was made, just like at the beginning of the year, to help them feel a little more comfortable being in the building, where there's a lot of things for them to process throughout the day and I'm sure having a buddy along the way helps. (Nancy, 5-8 Math teacher, interview, December 2019)

Though there is comfort in having others around you who are like you, educators said that they would like to see native English-speaking students interacting with EL students both in

classroom and social spaces (like the cafeteria). Ella, a high school adjustment counselor, said,

> At the high school, our ELL students at lunch, for the majority, all sit together. METCO students, typically, not always, but typically sit together at lunch, and it's just very interesting. So, there's not a lot of integration with other students. (Ella, 9-12+ School Adjustment Counselor, interview, November 2019)

Tania, a high school world language teacher, expressed a desire for her English learners to connect to each other, and said,

> I wish that I had more ability to find more commonalities amongst my English language learners and my students, I feel as though there's a gap that...they'll work together, they'll be polite, I don't see any deep friendships forming, and that's not necessarily anyone's fault, it's just that I think that maybe they would be more invested if they were able to do that. (Tania, 9-12+ World Language teacher, interview, December 2019)

Self Theme. Interviewee confidence was a helpful theme when thinking about an educator's attitude. A small number of interviewees expressed confidence in their ability to meet the needs of English learners in their classrooms. This confidence was often qualified with reasoning such as the fact that the interviewee is a special education teacher and therefore knows how to meet the needs of English learner students (which, of course, are two very different needs).

First, educators seemed confident in their ability to differentiate instruction for English learner students. Veronica, a middle school special education teacher said of her experience with an EL student a few years ago:

> To me it was good because of my background in special ed, I felt that I was able to help him. I was able to modify the curriculum, I was able to provide him support, and modify the tests and the study guides and things like that because of my special ed background. (Veronica, 5-8 Special Education teacher, interview, December 2019)

Interviewees who were not confident at least expressed the fact that they do differentiate to the best of their ability. As noted previously, EL students are often placed in classes or on teams where they have increased access to special education teachers. This proves to be somewhat concerning due to the fact that differentiating for an English learner is very different from differentiating for a student with a disability, but, nevertheless, the special education teachers reported confidence in meeting the needs of their English learners through differentiation. This differentiation did, for most interviewees, lead to an increased workload. A couple of secondary educators ($n > 2$) reported difficulties in trying to make their particular content area and grade level accessible to English learners, as best practices for teaching English learner students often includes strategies such as using visuals or pictures. This difficulty was also mentioned in the context of professional development needing to be relevant to all grade levels.

Another theme that emerged when looking at educator attitude was the fact that a number of educators ($n = 5$) expressed a sentiment somewhere along the line of doing a "disservice" to the English Learner students they have worked with. Some examples include the following quotes:

- "We aren't able to provide the instruction that allows them to make effective progress" (Arlene, 9-12+ SPED Math teacher, interview, December 2019)

- "I feel as though they're sort of invisible...so I'm part of this invisibility as well" (Tania, 9-12+ World Language teacher, interview, December 2019)
- "I think we could do a better job of it...I know I could improve my practice" (Neal, 9-12+ guidance counselor, interview, December 2019)
- "I always felt like I was doing a disservice, like they did not get the support they needed" (Yvette, 5-8 Math and Science teacher, interview, February 2020)
- "And I honestly feel like I'm constantly not giving these students what they actually need to be fully successful" (Naomi, 5-8 English teacher, interview, February 2020)

Just the awareness of this need was encouraging, as it demonstrated a desire to help English learner students and fit in well with the theory of critical pedagogy.

District Program Theme. Overall, educators seemed unfamiliar with the specifics of district policies, tools, and procedures, and could really only expound upon those with which they had had personal experience. Because of this, answers were more reflective of an educator's attitude rather than his/her knowledge. For example, Tania, a high school World Language teacher, shared that the union had to step in because bilingual teachers were being asked to translate documents (required by federal and state policy) and interpret during meetings. Tania was particularly concerned about documents that could have legal ramifications such as the example she provided, which was a permission slip for a school trip that involved international travel and an overnight stay.

Interviewees frequently mentioned scheduling (n = 9). Concern was expressed about when students are pulled from academic classes to receive ESL instruction and what the role of the ESL teacher is when conducting that instruction. Interviewees were justified in their

concern about scheduling, as this is an ongoing issue in the ESL field. In Jackson, according to the interviews, students were sometimes pulled from an entire academic subject, sometimes were pulled from a different academic subject each day or went to their ESL class during a "skills" period. Naomi, a middle school English teacher, shared the following about the scheduling of English learners:

> In the past, I've had students who would see me a couple days out of our six-day cycle, and other days they'd be receiving services. This year my students come to me for every single class, so I do see them every day just like my non-English learner students. (Naomi, 5-8 English teacher, interview, February 2020)

The issue of students missing academic classes, however, was only a part of the challenges in scheduling ESL instruction for EL students. Naomi shared that it was also difficult to find time to collaborate with the ESL teacher, saying, "she's also in our building for only half of the day because we split her with the high school, so it's not really easy timing wise to figure out how to work together on things" (Naomi, 5-8 English teacher, interview, February 2020). Collaboration between the ESL teacher and the classroom teacher is essential to meeting the needs of English learners, as they need both SEI and ESL instruction as explained previously. Nancy, a 5-8 Math teacher was also concerned about this fact, saying,

> She's been, throughout the year, been checking in, unfortunately her schedule isn't great for when we're available to all meet, but I know we've been doing our best, cause in the morning she's at the high school, and that's the only time my team has any prep time. (Nancy, 5-8 Math teacher, interview, December 2019)

Veronica, a veteran 5-8 special education teacher, shared an even stronger sentiment towards the ESL teacher's schedule, saying,

> So, I was kinda [sic] frustrated because I think that they still need work, they still need to add more staff, because I think she's like all over the place. I think she's not here full time, this is a big school, and they're coming in droves, so I think that [Jackson] is getting there, but they're not quite there yet with the support. Not if she has to be in another school. I believe she's between here and the high school. (Veronica, 5-8 Special Education teacher, interview, December 2019)

Amanda, a 5-8 English and Social Studies teacher, had concerns about the ESL teacher's time and her ability to meet the needs of all students identified as English learners. Amanda said of the ESL teacher that she didn't "meet with them" because she "didn't seem to have the time to" (Amanda, 5-8 English and Social Studies teacher, interview, December 2019). Yvette, a 5-8 Science teacher, had similar concerns, though hers seemed the most student-centered of the concerns about scheduling:

> I felt like they did not, you know, the schedule was more important than the child. So, in other words, they would pull the kids out of class a different subject each day for their lessons, their ELL lessons. So when they would come back to class the next day, like they were even more lost cause number one it's hard enough for them to begin with, then second they were pulling them out of class every other day, a different subject, so when they came back, it was like, you know that's hard for a regular...you know an English speaking student never mind someone that's trying to learn the language and trying to keep up with the curriculum. So, I always felt like that was the biggest disservice, like the scheduling of their ELL instruction. Cause they were always trying to catch up- they were always like a day behind. So that part was really hard. So even with supports in place, with modifications and all that it still was not a

> good situation. Like we would not do that to a student on an IEP, you know what I mean, so why are we doing it to the ELL student? (Yvette, 5-8 Math and Science teacher, interview, February 2020)

In the upper grades, students were also assigned to classes based on scheduling rather than academic ability. Nora, a middle school Math teacher, said, "I don't think particular attention is paid to their academic ability, just that for ease of scheduling, they're put into the same section so they can also be pulled or supported accordingly" (Nora, 5-8 Math teacher, interview, November 2019). Arlene, a Special Education Math teacher shared that student scheduling was based on "what other classes needed to be fit in" (Arlene, 9-12+ SPED Math teacher, interview, December 2019) and not necessarily on a student's academic ability, just as Nora shared. Arlene also acknowledged that students did not have time in their schedules for "academic help" or "academic support" and were "not in a position to stay after school" (Arlene, 9-12+ SPED Math teacher, interview, December 2019). Nora also had concerns about when ESL department collaboration meetings were scheduled, as ESL teachers had to miss instructional periods. For most regular academic staff, these meetings were built into the daily schedule and were planned during times when students were in their "specialist" classes (Art, Music, Physical Education, etc.).

Many educators reported that the way students were placed was "random." Although this could have been an indicator that educators were not knowledgeable about the process, it seemed also to point to a lack of trust in the policy and the enacting of policy. In regard to the process being successful, it was evident that interviewees felt as though progress could be made in this area, especially in regard to communication from the district. One interviewee said that students just "show up" in her classroom (Rose, 5-8 Math and Science teacher,

interview, November 2019); another said that there is “zero process” in the district (Neal, 9-12+ guidance counselor, interview, December. 2019).

Not all educators shared concerns about ESL teacher and EL student scheduling. Heather, a new Special Education administrator, shared that her experience regarding student scheduling had generally been positive, saying,

> From what I’ve seen, given that I’d had a short time of tenure in [Jackson], is that the students of English Language Learner status have been placed within the ESL classroom, for a given amount of time, and receive support there for the necessary instructional time, and then they’re also scheduled into other academic classes where it’s appropriate. (Heather, 9-12 Special Education administrator, interview, December 2019)

This quote is also important because it shows an understanding of the policies that govern the amount of instructional time that an English learner needs to have with an ESL teacher.

Every single (n = 12) middle school and high school educator mentioned a “new” ESL teacher. This was the theme that most surprised me as a researcher. Interviewees were eager to share that there was a new ESL teacher this year and that there have been a number of important changes and improvements to the services and supports that both the EL students and teachers are receiving. This particular teacher was described as “amazing” and “fantastic” (Tania, 9-12+ World Language teacher, interview, December 2019), and seemingly most important, “available” (Rose, 5-8 Math and Science teacher, interview, November 2019). Interviewees also described particular supports that have been provided such as building wide emails containing articles about supporting ELs (Nancy, 5-8 Math teacher, interview, December 2019; Amanda, 5-8 English and Social Studies teacher,

interview, December 2019; Veronica, 5-8 Special Education teacher, interview, December 2019; Nicole, 9-12+ ISP, interview, December 2019). Of course, it is difficult to objectively measure the effect that this new teacher has had on the program (and whether or not the "new-ness" is a novelty rather than a significant factor in the program's improvement) here, but it was impossible to ignore the morale boost that this new hire has had on the perception of the EL program. Though this finding informs my results, it would best fit into a future study that examined the role of an ESL teacher in English learner programs.

In general, the district procedures were not known to interviewees, and one quote sums it up the general sentiment of the interviews when it came to knowledge of process: "It seems...if there is a process, we're never told about it, we're never explained about it [sic], don't have any input into it" (Tania, 9-12+ World Language teacher, interview, December 2019). However negative, this quote illuminated the need for better communication about district policies and processes.

Summary of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

Based on the data and analysis from the survey and interviews, Jackson Public School district appears to be on course to improve the English learner identification and placement process, including through innovative changes and ideas that might serve to improve the learning process for ELs. The biggest finding from the survey was that educator perspectives on English learner identification and placement are correlated with life experience and direct experience teaching English learners. The analysis of the data showed a statistically significant variation among groups when looking at educator knowledge and the number of ELs an educator has had in the past 3 years. Survey data also showed that many educators felt as though the communication regarding English learners and related processes and

policies was insufficient. The interview responses and analysis helped illuminate these findings, as it was evident that district staff as a whole did not feel very informed: whether it be about students' backgrounds, policies, or even whether or not a student in one's classroom is an English learner.

Through this data and analysis on knowledge and attitude, one is able to understand a part of the identification and placement process that is not often captured by research—that of the educators' perspective. Though teaching and learning stands outside of the core of the identification and placement process, looking at educators' perspectives allows one to draw preliminary conclusions about the outcome of the process, which in turn can inform the understanding of the process itself. Knowledge and attitude of and toward the identification and placement process may not be directly linked to educators' ability to meet the needs of the English learner students in their classrooms and/or caseloads, but, based on the findings, educators with direct experience with ELs reported themselves to be more knowledgeable. Future study would need to examine the relationship between knowledge and attitude and teacher efficacy, but this study starts the conversation around amplifying educators' voices in the identification and placement process.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The specifics of this study originated from an interest in understanding educators' perceptions of English learner identification and placement. This interest, however, was deeply rooted in a desire to improve the experience of English learners in the Jackson Public Schools and throughout the state and country. Learning English is an essential tool for success in U.S. schools and, more importantly, in life outside of and after school. However, there is more to English learning than just the language itself, and foundational to the opportunity to learn is being identified and placed correctly. Day to day life as an English learner means coming face to face with the various intersections that make us human, but these intersections are magnified when you do not yet have proficiency in the language of school.

After refining the problem of practice for this study, inauthentic praxis when it comes to identification and placement of English learners, I examined existing literature on laws and policies and tools and procedures. This examination of the literature was framed within the theoretical framework which was constructed for the purposes of this study: Critical Organizational Praxis. This framework layers the theories of critical pedagogy, critical constructivism, and intersectionality in order to capture praxis at the organizational level. Studying the literature through the lens of theory made it clear that there was a gap in the

literature regarding English learners: there was no literature on knowledge and attitude of educators on outcomes of English learner identification and placement. The research study was then designed based on the problem of practice and the gap in the literature. The study itself consisted of two phases: first was the administration of a survey and subsequent quantitative analysis of the survey data and second was a series of interviews that were transcribed and analyzed qualitatively through coding.

Summary of Findings

The purpose of this study was to answer the following questions:

- What knowledge do educators of English learners have about the process of identification and placement and how might an educator's background (demographic data) influence this knowledge?
- What are educators' attitudes about the process of English learner identification and placement and how might an educator's background (demographic data) influence these attitudes?

Due to the sequential nature of this project, it is essential to take the time to integrate and discuss the relationship between the findings from the two phases of data collection and analysis. The qualitative findings help to interpret and clarify the quantitative findings (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2016).

Findings from Survey Data

The demographic makeup of the survey respondents roughly mirrored the district as a whole, as the majority of respondents were white females who had been teaching for eight years or more. Based on initial data on educator knowledge, educators reported to be more familiar with the WIDA screener assessment, but less familiar with district, federal, and state

policy, along with the process of school registration. Initial data on educator attitude showed that educators believed themselves to be knowledgeable about the process, while also acknowledging that teaching ELs would be difficult. Educators also reported that the process of identifying and placing students is not communicated clearly in Jackson.

After reporting on demographic data and general trends, the concepts (knowledge and attitude) and related indicators were tested in SPSS for statistical significance among demographic groups (age, gender, number of ELs taught, years teaching). The number of English learners an educator has had in the past three years was the biggest factor in an educator's knowledge of identification and placement. For the concept of attitude and related indicators, however, none of the tested demographic variables showed a statistically significant difference in educator attitude. This led me to conclude that direct experience teaching English learners is an important factor in educators' knowledge of English learner identification and placement. Though the demographic data tested did not have a statistically significant effect on attitude, based on the data trends for both knowledge and attitude, there is still a need for increased communication about the English learner identification and placement policy and process.

Findings from Interview Data

The findings from the interviews were essential in explaining the survey findings. The survey showed that the number of English learners an educator has had in the past three years was the biggest factor in an educator's knowledge of identification and placement. The survey questions about knowledge were general, while the interview questions filled in the blanks of "knowledge of _____." The question of an educator's experience with the placement of ELs (Appendix D, question #1) was designed to probe at the individual's

experience with having ELs assigned to his or her classroom or caseload. The question about an educators' knowledge of the process (Appendix D, question #2) was to directly ask for the educator's self-reported level of knowledge. Finally, the question of professional development experience (Appendix D, question #3) was written with the goal of understanding *what* professional development is available to educators in Jackson. The responses to all of the questions helped to build a picture of the nuances associated with educators' attitudes toward EL identification and placement.

One of the major interview findings was something that surprised me: that there are a number of important players in the identification and placement process that I had not previously considered as important players. This was especially true when it came to the role that guidance counselors had in course placement at the secondary level. In setting out to capture the voices of teachers, I did not consider that there are other educators that play equally if not more important roles in determining an EL's academic trajectory. As explained in chapter 1, I hesitated to even include the responses of non- "teachers," but, as noted in a memo I wrote in March 2020, I quickly changed my mind, writing,

> Another question that I need to figure out is whether to exclude any participants in the survey data—the groups that I'm wondering about are the ESL teachers (they may skew the data) and the non-teachers (guidance, SAC, para). In interviews, however, the non-teachers gave me some of the most important insights, so I hesitate to exclude them. Since "teacher" is in the title of my dissertation, am I able to include non-teachers if the information given was important?

This led to the change in focus from "teacher" to "educator."

Though the survey findings showed that having English learners in one's classroom (or on one's caseload) is related to knowledge, what a survey cannot do is to capture the "multiple, complex identities" (Collins & Bilge, 2016, p. 190) that all students have, but especially affect English learners. The interviews were able to show nuance in educators' knowledge of intersections and the way that these intersections help to form an EL's identity. The survey only probed knowledge of the intersection of English learners with disabilities. The interviews, however, were able to highlight a number of intersections as shown in the Chapter 4.

Discussion of Findings

Below, the relationship between this study's findings and the literature will be discussed for the two concepts studied: knowledge and attitude. Overall, it was difficult to compare the findings to the existing knowledge base because there is so little about educator perspectives. However, the literature around theory helps to illuminate the findings as they are consistent with my initial hypothesis, which is that there is a lack of authentic praxis (Freire, 1970/2000) within the organizations that implement English learner identification processes. Policy must be enacted with fidelity in order for students to be identified and placed properly. It is helpful to know that the survey analysis showed that demographics play a role in knowledge, because factors such as educator background could contribute to inauthentic praxis. Because there is limited literature on educators' perspectives on identification and placement, this study can help form the foundation for future research on the topic.

Though the phrase "critical pedagogy" was not used by interviewees, it was clear that the suggested practices and strategies would help students to move towards liberation and a

more equitable schooling experience. Though it could be argued that "formal schooling is a contested site of knowledge production" because "it helps reproduce social inequalities" (Collins & Bilge, 2016, p. 166), I believe that asking the right questions and having educators reflect on their experiences leads to knowledge that is helpful for policy and practice. The educators who shared ideas about learning more about students and having student-led practices in the classroom were promoting liberation by "engaging oppressed people in the process of knowledge production" (Collins & Bilge, 2016, p. 165). Even though these practices have not been put into place, they reflect a desire to help English learners in a way that is effective and liberatory. If the intersections are linked to inequality and power differences between groups, how then can we identify and place students in such a way that they are moved towards liberation rather than oppression?

Knowledge Research Question

The first research question was "What knowledge do educators of English learners have about the process of identification and placement and how might an educator's background (demographic data) influence this knowledge?" This section will look at the literature and findings in order to highlight where my findings confirm what is in the literature about knowledge and when my findings are different from what is found in the literature. The three major connections to themes in the literature explored in this section are connections to pedagogy, connections to trauma, and connections to professional development. This section will also discuss, when applicable, the ways that the interview results helped to explain the survey results.

Connections to Pedagogy. In looking at the findings about knowledge from the survey and interviews, it is clear that critical pedagogy would be a helpful solution for guiding the English language identification and placement process. The literature shows that home language survey and subsequent assessment is a policy that works when implemented with fidelity (Goldenberg & Quach, 2010; Haas et al., 2015). Like having high expectations and teaching ambitiously, utilizing critical pedagogy in the classroom (and ultimately at the organizational level) will help *all* students (and educators too!). Interview findings illuminated knowledge of pedagogy in terms of expectations. In a study of students with "diverse academic needs," Blazar and Archer (2020) found that interpersonal relationships are associated with higher self-efficacy and also that "ambitious math instruction" does reach *all* students. Collins and Bilge (2016) state the following about Freire's work in critical pedagogy (education):

> While Freire grounds his analysis of critical education in the needs of oppressed people, the value of critical education is open to everyone. Everyone benefits from a better understanding of the dynamics of intersecting social inequalities, as well as the kinds of critical thinking and problem-posing skills that can remedy them. (p. 163)

A number of the interviewed educators expressed concern over what their expectations should be for students, as they knew the importance of high expectations but did not know how that applies to teaching English learners. Though expectations were not probed specifically in the survey, the interview findings around expectations served to explain and elaborate upon the concept of teacher knowledge.

Connections to Trauma. Trauma, in particular, stood out as something that educators had knowledge of. The literature showed that trauma-informed instruction is an important consideration when thinking about meeting the needs of ELs (Cole et al., 2005; DeCapua & Marshall, 2010; H. W. Marshall & DeCapua, 2013; McBrien, 2005). The recurrent theme of trauma in ELs' lives was consistent with the literature (Cole et al., 2005; DeCapua & Marshall, 2010; H. W. Marshall & DeCapua, 2013; McBrien, 2005). As noted in the findings, educators learned of students' trauma from their relationships with the students rather than from student records. An important first step in supporting students is knowing that they have experienced trauma, as then an educator can utilize trauma-informed pedagogy. As one important work on trauma notes, "With the help of educators, traumatized children can flourish in their school communities and master the educational tasks of childhood, despite their overwhelming experiences" (Cole et al., 2005, p. 9).

Connections to Professional Development. Professional development is often a district's means of advancing educators' knowledge on a particular subject related to his/her position in the district. The literature shows that Sheltered English Instruction (SEI) is an essential part of a successful English Language Education (ELE) program (Coleman & Goldenberg, 2012; DESE, 2016; WIDA Consortium, 2012). Though attitudes towards SEI training varied in the interviews, the district's program for training teachers is consistent with the literature. The interview findings helped to further elaborate upon the findings from the survey, as a large number of survey respondents had participated in the professional development opportunities offered by the district. As far as professional development in Jackson, all interviewees (N = 15) had taken either a district offered professional development course (called the "5 Part Series") or the state course called RETELL that leads

to SEI endorsement. Beyond this, however, only one interviewee had taken an outside course, and the purpose of the course was to pass the test that was an alternate route to the SEI endorsement. Because one of the major interview findings was the role that educators other than classroom teachers have in identification and placement of ELs, more must be done to include ALL educators in professional development that pertains to ELs. Jackson's EL Department had made some progress in this regard by having the following policy:

> Along with core-academic teachers and administrators participating in the SEI course, all staff members will be required to obtain 15 PDPs in SEI or ESL and 15 PDPs related to instruction of students with disabilities. The [Jackson] Public Schools Professional Development Plan will consist of no-cost options for teachers to obtain these PDPs, such as SEI coaching, ESL action-research, and a Five-Part Menu Series ESL training.

This is a great first step, but more could be done to include all educators in more robust professional development opportunities. Therefore, this may need to be something that happens on the state level rather than on the district level.

The discussion of professional development experiences in the interviews made it clear that there is room for improvement (or at least room for increased participant buy-in and engagement). In my experience as an educator, however, professional development is not always a favored component of one's job requirements. Analysis of the survey data showed that direct experience with English learners led to increased knowledge and a more positive attitude toward, so the types of professional development offered in the future could be more experiential in order to improve educator knowledge and attitude.

Attitude Research Question

The second question for this research was "What are educators' attitudes about the process of English learner identification and placement and how might an educator's background (demographic data) influence these attitudes?" This section will look at the literature and findings in order to highlight where my findings confirm what is in the literature about attitude and when my findings are different from what is found in the literature. In terms of attitude, the major finding from the survey was that none of the demographic variables tested had a statistically significant effect on an educator's attitude toward English learner identification and placement. The connections to the themes in the literature discussed in this section are connections to district communication, connections to the district program, and connections to students and families. This section of the discussion will also explore, when applicable, the ways that the interview findings helped to explain the findings of the survey.

Connections to District Communication. The survey data showed that there was a need for increased communication about EL identification and placement. The interviewed educators, however, seemed generally confident and aware of the things they needed or wanted to know about supporting the English learners in their classroom and on their caseloads. In this case, the findings from the interviews did not directly help to explain the findings from the survey. However, just like in the data on knowledge, educators had little knowledge of the policies and programs beyond their direct experience and used phrases like "random" and "just showed up" when discussing their experiences with EL student placement. This was consistent with the literature (Kim et al., 2018), as educators in Jackson

did not report these experiences as misidentification but rather as a lack of knowledge about the process itself. Attitude towards the district was generally positive, though a number of educators had concerns about weak areas in the EL program (staffing, scheduling, roles, etc.).

Connections to District Program. The literature shows and my research confirms that scheduling instruction for English learners is an important dilemma that needs to be addressed (Coleman & Goldenberg, 2012; Gándara & Rumberger, 2009; Johnson, 2019). The intersections highlighted in the analysis of knowledge findings above also complicate some of the suggestions in the literature regarding after school and extended day programs (Greenberg, 2013; Johnson, 2019). An important sub-theme that arose in the interviews was the schedules of English learner students and teachers. This sub-theme helps to further explain the finding from the survey data that showed that educators did not think that the district communicated well about English learners. As cited in the interview findings, students in Jackson often could not stay after school because of having a job or because of a lack of transportation. In addition, districts are required to provide equal access for English learners to extracurriculars (*Castañeda v. Pickard*, 1981; DESE, 2016; Lhamon & Gupta, 2015) and having an extended day or after school program for English acquisition, though a creative use of time, might block access. Another scheduling conflict that was mentioned in interviews was how to schedule English learners during the day, as English learners have additional knowledge and content they need to learn but not additional time during the day. The interviews yielded information about how the schools scheduled EL instruction; one educator even said that her ELs did not receive any direct instruction in English from an ESL teacher. In general, especially at the middle school level, students either missed a different subject every day, or one subject altogether (in my experience, the subject missed is usually

English or Social Studies). The literature confirms this finding. Some districts have tried increasing the amount of time that students receive direct English instruction, but instead of this helping students, it is taking time away from valuable content learning in subjects such as Math, Science, and Social Studies (Gándara & Rumberger, 2009). However, another study showed that students who were identified as English Learners did better on an English Language Arts test (Shin, 2018). As noted in Chapter 2, this finding suggests that even if students are taken out of some of their regular academic classes in order to receive English instruction, the benefit of instruction in English may outweigh the loss of regular class time. This study did not look specifically at achievement scores, so learning more about student achievement and scheduling in Jackson would be an item for future study.

Connections to Students and Families. Discussion of procedures overlapped with the critical constructivist analysis that explored the seemingly not-neutral practices of grouping students together. Though the survey data showed quite a bit of variation among responses about district, state, and federal policy, educators interviewed did not seem to know if grouping students together was an official policy or rather a common procedure when identifying and/or placing students. One example of this was that a number of educators showed concern for minority students sitting together in the cafeteria; which is a concept addressed by the book *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?* by Beverly Daniel Tatum (1997/2017a). In an interview with Minnesota Public Radio, Tatum (2017b) said, "our concern should be less about what kids are doing in their free time at lunch and more about what's happening in the classroom." She also explained that the reason for kids of color sitting together is often for the purpose of "connecting with peers who are having a similar experience as your own serves as a buffer, as a protective force. ... [It] is

also a way of affirming your identity" (Tatum, 2017b). However, schools that have a program that focuses on identity, especially understanding and accepting one's identity have a much less "segregated" cafeteria (Tatum, 1997/2017a, 2017b), so perhaps this is something that Jackson could implement in the future so help students with identity formation.

Ella, the high school adjustment counselor, shared one anecdote of a student who connected with the English learners a number of years ago because he had been a teaching assistant (TA) in the EL class. The young man she spoke of was fluent in Spanish and was able to connect well with all of the students, but especially the students whose native language was Spanish. She explained the situation saying,

> He was a TA and it was fascinating to watch him integrate into the groups and have them integrate into his group. You know what I mean? Because it was just very natural. And I feel like we don't have that right now. Right now, it feels very segregated. And I do lunch duty, and I can see the kids, and they're having a nice time, they're enjoying each other, and I think it feels nice, but it's interesting to me. (Ella, 9-12+ School Adjustment Counselor, interview, November 2019)

This is a great example of the beginnings of critical pedagogy at work: having a student-centered solution to a situation; a solution which helps all parties involved, but ultimately supporting the "oppressed" students. However, this could be made even better by having the English learner students (and other marginalized groups) being able to voice their need for social integration (if indeed it is something they desire), rather than just finding a student from the majority group to "help" them.

Findings and Critical Organizational Praxis

The proposed theory of critical organizational praxis maintains that administrative practices (such as EL identification and placement) can be liberating and humanizing. Layering critical pedagogy, critical constructivism, and intersectionality in the analysis of the qualitative and quantitative helps to form a picture of the context in which the actions associated with identification and placement are performed. Based on the data and analysis in previous chapters, a major takeaway of this study is that the process of identification and placement needs to be better defined and communicated so that educators can meet the needs of ELs. The literature shows that proper identification truly matters (Abedi, 2008; Shin, 2018). Fortunately, there is a desire for improvement on the program level and personal level that was evident in all stages of research. As the district moves towards a more robust and effective ELE program, addressing the possibility for liberation and humanization at the organizational level will be essential. Additionally, the implications that follow can be viewed through this lens.

Implications of Findings

This study is the beginning of filling the gap on the knowledge base about educators' perspectives on English learner identification and placement. Based on the integration of the findings and the related literature, there are a number of implications for different stakeholders. Below, implications for educators, districts, and policy are explored; all of which have the goal of improving the academic outcomes and experiences of English learner students and their families.

Implications for Educators

This study led to two major implications for educators. The first implication for educators is that the data suggests that educators need to have well-defined high expectations for all of their students, and especially for English learner students. This is consistent with the literature (Blazar & Archer, 2020; Calderón et al., 2011; Louie et al., 2019; Saphier et al., 2008). If an educator is unsure about what his or her expectations should be, he or she should seek out the advice of an ESL teacher or a more experienced colleague.

The second implication is that, based on the data, it appears that direct experience with English learners is essential. Of course, educators cannot control if and when English learners are placed in their classrooms, but districts should keep a closer eye on placement so that more educators have more experience with teaching English learners or having English learners on their caseload. In this case, the responsibility of the educator is to be open to having these students placed in his/her classes and willing to do the work and learning necessary to help ELs. English learner students and their families need educators who are willing to help them develop and use their voice.

Implications for Districts

The major implications for districts from this study are the need for resourcing educators. This "resourcing" can come from a number of models, two of which will be explored in this section: professional development and instructional coaching. This study showed that educators did not think that there is sufficient communication about English learner identification and placement in the district. It also suggested that educators' knowledge of identification and placement is connected to direct experiences with English learners. This could mean that districts monitor EL placement so that more teachers gain

direct experience with ELs, though this could lead to ELs being placed with inexperienced teachers and/or separated from their EL peers. As an alternative, districts could work to create an environment that would allow all educators to have the same knowledge without having to have the same experience. One idea would be to increase professional development on identification and placement to help shape educators' attitudes, increase their knowledge, and ultimately improve the language development and academic outcomes of ELs. Or would more professional development or coaching replicate the knowledge and attitude that is produced by direct experience with English learners?

Instructional coaching is another way that districts may be able to improve communication about identification and placement and to also replicate the effects that direct experience with ELs has on knowledge. Coaching may "level the playing field" and diminish the difference in knowledge and attitude that exist for different demographic groups. Based on the research (Calderón et al., 2011; Teemant, 2018), coaching is proven means of supporting teachers, especially those who are supporting ELs. As this study showed, however, there are a number of important stakeholder groups that are not teachers. There appears to be little research on coaching in the guidance counselor field, but, based on the findings of this research, we might expect that guidance counselors might still benefit from coaching that is focused on helping them to meet the needs of the ELs on their caseloads.

Finally, the data suggests that districts need to support administrators in the implementation of policy. In a recent study of policy implementation, Mavrogordato and White (2020) conclude the following:

> School leaders exert substantial influence over how policy is enacted in their schools...While school leaders are tasked with implementing different education

> policies every day, our study shows that school leaders may not be aware of the potential for policy implementation to serve as a mechanism to enable social justice in their schools, thereby overlooking a valuable opportunity to expand educational opportunity for underserved students such as ELs. (pp. 35-36)

Administrators, like all educators, have the unique opportunity to promote social justice and districts should be in support of this type of liberatory action when it comes to supporting English learners. Viewing organizational practices and the actions of administrators through critical organizational praxis can be a means of leaning into the opportunity to promote liberation and humanization for ELs.

Implications for Policy

Based on the findings of this study, there are three implications for policy. The first is that policy needs to be better communicated at all levels. Based on the review of the literature and the survey and interview data, it is evident that there has been little focus on communication of policies and procedures both in Jackson and in prior research. Policy research often looks at the enacting of policy and the policies themselves but does not examine how policy is communicated. This could also be a topic of future research.

The second implication for policy is further definition of the role of an ESL teacher that is communicated clearly. This could even mean re-engineering the role to create space for potential coaching and/or professional development. Redefining or clarifying the role of ESL teachers would also mean looking at scheduling, and possibly an overhaul of how and when English learners are taught during the school day. The state of Massachusetts recently went through a re-visioning process for English learner programming (DESE, 2020b), and yet did not look further at the role of the ESL teacher.

A final policy suggestion based on the data would be to include ALL educators in the required professional development (RETELL) that leads to the SEI endorsement, as this study showed that there are educators other than classroom teachers who are playing important roles in the identification and placement of ELs. The state has made some progress in this regard, as starting in 2012 re-licensure requires 15 PDPs in ESL/SEI and this includes licenses such as School Business Administrators (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2020a). However, due to licensing regulations, the requirements for such training do not apply to all educators, especially early career educators.

Further Research

In asking the question "what now?" it seems that the answer lies in the practice of coaching educators of ELs. Because implementing a coaching structure of professional development is the main recommendation that comes from this study, it would be quite helpful to repeat this study after coaching has been implemented. Knowing how exactly to replicate the knowledge and attitude of educators who are meeting the needs of English learners would help educators and ultimately help ELs. Before looking more specifically at further study, though, the limitations of this study must be explained as there are a number of opportunities for future studies that are able to reduce the impact of the limitations faced by this current study.

Limitations and Further Research

The limitations of this study were largely the limitations inherent in collecting data via surveys and interviews and the subsequent analysis (see Chapter 3 for a more in-depth discussion of the limitations of this type of mixed-methods research). I worked diligently to recruit respondents so that the sample would reflect the population as closely as possible.

However, participants likely responded because of some sort of interest in the topic and so responses would not completely reflect the whole population. Some of these limitations were addressed and accounted for in the demographic data analysis in Chapter 4. One limitation that specifically relates to opportunities for research is that of the relationship between professional development and the concepts of educator knowledge and attitude. The survey question that addressed professional development did not sufficiently elicit the information that would be necessary for drawing any conclusions, especially through statistical analysis. Additionally, most educators studied had been required to participate in professional development related to ELs, so participation alone may not be a sufficient measure of the relationship between professional development and teacher attitude and knowledge.

Another limitation of this study is researcher bias. As a former student and later employee of the Jackson Public Schools, a number of interviewees (and likely survey respondents) were individuals that I already knew. For this reason, I was careful to not have any identifying information in survey responses. This allowed me to reduce any effect that personal knowledge of the survey respondent may have. Any limitation caused by my background, however, was outweighed by the obvious honesty and comfort that was evident in the interviews with those who I did know, and much of the information that I received was rich and new to me. I have also been away from the district for a number of years and so this also minimized any limitation that my previous relationships with the district might have on the data collection process.

Finally, as with any site-specific research, there are limitations to the generalizability of the findings as noted in Chapters 3. One must consider that the differences between higher incidence (usually urban) and low incidence districts may be too significant for any true

generalizability. One educator shared the following with me about the urban district she worked in for many years:

> Intake [EL identification] is all conducted in one of three hubs and then the students are assigned to one of many schools. There, at the school site, placement decisions are often reversed or revised due to what teachers observe via ELL students' performance and other data, including what students tell them about their past experiences. Some teachers are good at recognizing an improper placement but others aren't, and kids can languish in classrooms for a long time, wasting precious instructional time until someone figures it out. (E. Montano, personal communication, November 2020).

How, then, can educators be given the tools they need to sufficiently understand the identification process? Giving a voice to district educators when it comes to English learner identification and placement is a process that could be replicated in an urban district and would yield results that would help English learners.

Opportunities for Future Research

Future research that looks at placement data could be quite illuminating, including looking at the specific courses that students have taken (especially at the high school level). Future research could answer some of the lingering questions about whether students are frequently placed in classrooms with the same teachers. Though similar studies have been done such as Johnson's (2019) study of ELs' high school courses, I recommend a more specific study that looks at the educators with whom ELs are being placed and whether students should be taking more advanced classes instead of being placed in classrooms that have more support (inclusion classes) as some of the educators shared in interviews.

In addition, ethnographic study on the process of coming to school to register for the first time could help add to the knowledge base, as my personal observations have shown that initial entry into a school building is often not a neutral experience. Learning about the process from this perspective would help to further uncover the societal forces that play into the outcomes. It would also capture the nuances associated with the implementation of the process, and therefore add specificity to the idea of inauthentic praxis.

It is exciting to think about how this work will influence present policy and practice and future research. Fully capturing what the needs of English learners and educators of English learners are will allow districts to better meet those needs. For now, the biggest question that remains is how to create an environment where there is reduced variation within groups of educators regarding knowledge of and attitude toward English learner identification and placement—not because of a desire for uniformity amongst educators, but rather a desire for educators to feel thoroughly prepared and confident in their own ability and their district's ability to meet the needs of English learner students.

APPENDIX A

MASSACHUSETTS HOME LANGUAGE SURVEY

The Massachusetts home language survey in English[7], Portuguese [8], and Simplified Chinese[9]. This document is available in 27 additional languages spoken by students in Massachusetts. This document, in addition to collecting information on the home language, also serves to track the need for translation/interpretation of school information and parent-teacher meetings.

Home Language Survey

Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education regulations require that *all* schools determine the language(s) spoken in each student's home in order to identify their specific language needs. This information is essential in order for schools to provide meaningful instruction for all students. If a language other than English is spoken in the home, the District is required to do further assessment of your child. Please help us meet this important requirement by answering the following questions. Thank you for your assistance.

Student Information

First Name _____ Middle Name _____ Last Name _____ F ☐ M ☐ Gender

Country of Birth _____ Date of Birth (mm/dd/yyyy) ___/___/___ Date first enrolled in ANY U.S. school (mm/dd/yyyy) ___/___/___

School Information

Start Date in New School (mm/dd/yyyy) ___/___/20___ Name of Former School and Town _____ Current Grade _____

Questions for Parents/Guardians

What is the native language(s) of each parent/guardian? (circle one) _____ (mother / father / guardian) _____ (mother / father / guardian)	Which language(s) are spoken with your child? (include relatives -*grandparents, uncles, aunts,etc.* - and caregivers) _____ seldom / sometimes / often / always _____ seldom / sometimes / often / always
What language did your child first understand and speak?	Which language do you use most with your child?
Which other languages does your child know? (circle all that apply) _____ speak / read / write _____ speak / read / write	Which languages does your child use? (circle one) _____ seldom / sometimes / often / always _____ seldom / sometimes / often / always
Will you require written information from school in your native language? Y ☐ N ☐	Will you require an interpreter/translator at Parent-Teacher meetings? Y ☐ N ☐
Parent/Guardian Signature: X	___/___/20___ Today's Date: (mm/dd/yyyy)

[7] http://www.doe.mass.edu/ell/hlsurvey/
[8] http://www.doe.mass.edu/ell/hlsurvey/Portuguese.pdf
[9] http://www.doe.mass.edu/ell/hlsurvey/Chinese_sim.pdf

Pesquisa de idioma doméstico

Os regulamentos do departamento de Educação Elementar e Secundária de Massachusetts exigem que *todas* as escolas determinem os idiomas falados no domicílio de cada aluno para identificar suas necessidades de idioma específicas. Essa informação é essencial para que as escolas ofereçam instrução significativa para todos os alunos. Se outro idioma que não seja inglês for falado em casa, o distrito precisará realizar uma avaliação mais detalhada do seu filho. Por gentileza, ajude-nos a atender esse requisito importante, respondendo às seguintes perguntas. Agradecemos a sua ajuda.

Informações do aluno

Nome | Nome do meio | Sobrenome | F ☐ M ☐ Sexo

País de nascimento | Data de nascimento (mm/dd/aaaa) | Data do primeiro registro em QUALQUER escola norte americana (mm/dd/aaaa)

Informações da escola

Data de início na nova escola (mm/dd/aaaa) | Nome da escola e cidade antiga | Grau escolar atual

Perguntas para os pais/tutores

Quais são os idiomas nativos de cada pai/tutor? (circule uma) _____ (mãe / pai / tutor) _____ (mãe / pai / tutor)	**Quais idiomas são falados com seu filho?** (inclua parentes -*avós, tios, tias, etc.* - e babás) _____ pouca frequência / algumas vezes / com frequência / sempre _____ pouca frequência / algumas vezes / com frequência / sempre
Qual foi o primeiro idioma que seu filho compreendeu e falou?	**Qual idioma você usa com mais frequência com seu filho?**
Quais são os outros idiomas que seu filho conhece? (circule todas as opções aplicáveis) _____ fala / lê / escreve _____ fala / lê / escreve	**Quais são os idiomas que seu filho usa? (circule uma)** _____ pouca frequência / algumas vezes / com frequência / sempre _____ pouca frequência / algumas vezes / com frequência / sempre
Você deseja receber informações por escrito da escola em seu idioma nativo? S ☐ N ☐	**Você deseja um intérprete/tradutor presente nas reuniões entre pais-professores?** S ☐ N ☐
Assinatura dos pais/tutores: X	____/____/20____ **Data de hoje:** (mm/dd/aaaa)

Portuguese

家庭语言调查

马萨诸塞州小学与中学教育服务部规程要求*所有*学校鉴别每个学生在家常说的语言，以确定其具体的语言需要。为使各个学校为所有学生提供有意义的教学，提供这些信息至关重要。如果在家里说非英语的语言，则学区必须对孩子做进一步的评估。请回答下列问题以帮助我们达到此重要要求。感谢您的协助。

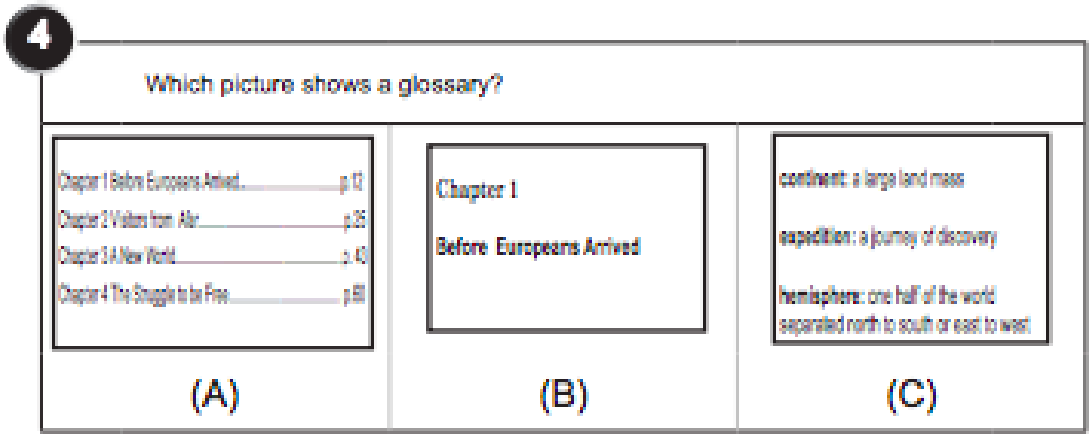
学生信息			
			女 ☐ 男 ☐
名	**中间名**	**姓**	**性别**
_____	____/____/____	____/____/____	
出生国家	**出生日期** (月/日/年)	**首次就读任何美国学校的日期** (月/日/年)	
学校信息			
____/____/20____	_____	_____	
新学校开始日期 (月/日/年)	**先前学校与城区名称**	**当前年级**	
家长/监护人的问题			
每位家长/监护人的母语是什么？（圈选一个） _____ （家长/父亲/监护人） _____ （家长/父亲/监护人）		**与您的孩子交谈用哪种语言？** （包括亲属- *祖父母、叔叔、阿姨等等*- 以及照顾者） _____ 很少/有时/经常/总是 _____ 很少/有时/经常/总是	
您的孩子首先理解和说哪种语言？		**您与孩子之间使用最多的语言是什么？**	
您的孩子还懂其他哪种语言？（圈选所有适用项）： _____ 说/读/写 _____ 说/读/写		**您的孩子使用哪种语言？（圈选一个）** _____ 很少/有时/经常/总是 _____ 很少/有时/经常/总是	
您想要从学校索取以您母语提供的书面资料吗？ **是** ☐ **否** ☐		**在家长教师会议中您需要口译员/翻译吗？** **是** ☐ **否** ☐	
家长/监护人签字： X		____/____/20____ **今天的日期：** (月/日/年)	

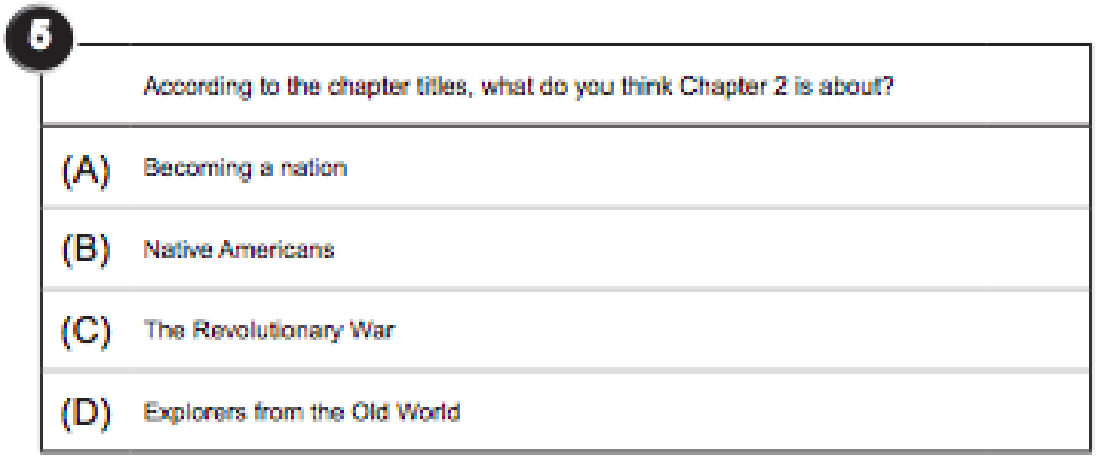
Simplified Chinese

APPENDIX B

SAMPLES OF INITIAL ASSESSMENT FOR ENGLISH LEARNERS

Samples of high level and low level Initial Assessment for English Learners for grades 6-8 from WIDA consortium.[10]





[10] https://www.wida.us/downloadLibrary.aspx

Part B: How Many Beans are in the Jar?

At the state fair, Ali and Camilla had to guess the number of beans in a jar. They each used a different way to estimate how many there were.

Read how Ali and Camilla made their estimates.

Ali's Method

I will count the bottom layer and then count the number of layers in the jar. Then I will multiply the number of beans in the bottom layer times the number of layers.

Now it's your turn to write!

1 Write a list of countries you have learned about.

Countries I Have Learned About

2 Complete the following sentences about your favorite country.

My favorite country is _____.

I liked learning about this country because _____.

APPENDIX C

QUALTRICS CONSENT AND SURVEY

Informed Consent

University of Massachusetts Boston
Department of Leadership in Education
100 Morrissey Boulevard
Boston, MA 02125-3393

Consent Form For English Learner Identification and Placement Study

Introduction and Contact Information
You are asked to take part in a research project that examines the process of English Learner Identification and Placement in the Wakefield Public Schools. The researcher is Rachel Hoffman, a PhD student in the Urban Education, Leadership, and Policy Studies Program at UMass Boston. Please read this form and feel free to ask questions. If you have further questions later, Rachel will discuss them with you. Her telephone number is 781-691-3477. You may also contact Dr. Wenfan Yan, Rachel's advisor, at 617-287-4873.

Description of the Project:
This study is looking at the English Learner identification and placement process. Participation in this survey will take approximately 5 minutes. If you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to complete the survey on Qualtrics. The survey will ask whether you would like to participate in a focus group. The focus group will last 45-60 minutes and will be voluntary. Focus group participants will receive a $5 Dunkin' (Donuts) gift card.

Risks or Discomforts:
The primary risk associated with this study is minimal and no greater than what is ordinarily encountered in daily life. You may speak with me to discuss any distress or other concerns related to your participation in the study.

Confidentiality and Anonymity:
Your part in this research is **confidential**. That is, the information gathered for this project will not be published or presented in a way that would allow anyone to identify you. Information gathered for this project will be stored in a locked file cabinet and only the research team will have access to the data. Digital information will be stored securely in a password-protected Qualtrics account.

Voluntary Participation:
The decision whether or not to take part in this research study is voluntary. If you do decide to take part in this study, you may terminate participation at any time without consequence. If you wish to terminate participation, you should e-mail Rachel at Rachel.Hoffman001@umb.edu. Whatever you decide will in no way affect your role in the Wakefield Public Schools.

Rights:
You have the right to ask questions about this research before you sign this form and at any time during the study. You can reach Rachel Hoffman at 617-691-3477 or Rachel.Hoffman001@umb.edu or Dr. Wenfan Yan at 617-287-4873 or Wenfan.Yan@umb.edu. If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please contact a representative of the Institutional Review Board (IRB), at the University of Massachusetts, Boston, which oversees research involving human participants. The Institutional Review Board may be reached by telephone or e-mail at (617) 287-5374 or at human.subjects@umb.edu.

Signatures
I HAVE READ THE CONSENT FORM. MY QUESTIONS HAVE BEEN ANSWERED. MY SIGNATURE ON THIS FORM MEANS THAT I CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY. I ALSO CERTIFY THAT I AM 18 YEARS OF AGE OR OLDER.

English Learner Identification & Placement

Please respond to the following statements using the scale below.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
In my experience, English learners are/have been placed in the correct classes.	○	○	○	○
Teaching English learners is/would be difficult.	○	○	○	○
I am knowledgeable about the process of identifying English learners.	○	○	○	○
The process of identifying and placing English learners is communicated clearly in my district.	○	○	○	○
My district meets the needs of regular education English learner students.	○	○	○	○
My district meets the needs of English learner students with a diagnosed disability.	○	○	○	○
I am confident in my ability to meet the needs of English learners.	○	○	○	○

Please rate your familiarity with the following.

	Not familiar at all	Slightly familiar	Moderately familiar	Very familiar	Extremely familiar
Federal English learner identification and placement policy	○	○	○	○	○
State English learner identification and placement policy	○	○	○	○	○
District English learner identification and placement policy	○	○	○	○	○

	Not familiar at all	Slightly familiar	Moderately familiar	Very familiar	Extremely familiar
The assessment used to identify English learners in Massachusetts (called WIDA screener)	○	○	○	○	○
The process of school registration for all students in my school/district	○	○	○	○	○

Is there anything else about English learner identification and/or placement in your school/district that you would like to share?

Have you participated in professional development related to English learners? If so, please explain what types of professional development.

Approximately how many English learner students have you had in the past 3 years?

- ○ none
- ○ 1-5
- ○ 6-10
- ○ 10 or more

Demographic Information

What grade level(s) do you currently teach? Select all that apply.

- ☐ PreK
- ☐ K-4

- [ ] 5-8
- [ ] 9-12+

What is your gender?

- ○ Male
- ○ Female
- ○ Other
- ○ Prefer not to answer

What is your age?

- ○ Under 18
- ○ 18 - 24
- ○ 25 - 34
- ○ 35 - 44
- ○ 45 - 54
- ○ 55 - 64
- ○ 65 - 74
- ○ 75 - 84
- ○ 85 or older
- ○ prefer not to answer

Please specify your ethnicity.

- ○ White
- ○ Black or African American
- ○ American Indian or Alaska Native
- ○ Hispanic or Latino/a
- ○ Asian
- ○ Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- ○ _____ Other
- ○ Prefer not to answer

How many years have you been teaching?

- ○ Three years or less
- ○ Four to seven years
- ○ Eight years or more

Do you speak a language other than English?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

Which subject(s) do you teach:

- ☐ Early childhood/Elementary
- ☐ Art
- ☐ Business
- ☐ English Language Arts (5-12)
- ☐ History/Social Studies (5-12)
- ☐ Mathematics (5-12)
- ☐ Music
- ☐ Physical Education
- ☐ Science (any area) (5-12)
- ☐ World Language
- ☐ Special Education
- ☐ _____ Other (please describe):

Follow-Up

Would you be interested in participating in a follow-up focus group?

- ○ Yes (if so, please provide an e-mail address so that the researcher may contact you. Please note, responses are private will not be linked to your e-mail address).
  _____
- ○ No

Powered by Qualtrics

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interview Questions (five questions ordered from general to specific[11]):

1. What has been your experience with the placement of English learners?
2. How does placement happen in your school/district?
3. What professional development have you received that helps you to support English learners in your classroom?
4. How does placement affect your classroom (paperwork, responsibilities, etc.)?
5. How is information about English learners and related processes communicated in your school/district? How familiar are you with the tools used to assess English learners?

[11] Based on protocol from https://www.bc.edu/content/dam/files/offices/vpsa/pdf/assessment/focus.pdf

APPENDIX E

RECRUITMENT AND CONSENT DOCUMENTS

Recruitment Email

Dear Teachers,

Hope you are all well! I'm writing to ask for your participation in a survey that I am conducting about the identification and placement of English learners. As I have been planning this project, it became very clear to me that this topic needs to be addressed—and you all are the experts, the ones who are working directly with these students each and every day.

The survey should take no longer than 10 minutes and can be found at the following link: http://bit.ly/elteachersurvey

In addition to the survey, I'll also be looking for teachers to participate in focus groups. Focus group participants will receive a $5 gift card to Dunkin' along with refreshments.

Please feel free to contact me or Superintendent Lyons with any questions you might have. My e-mail address is Rachel.Hoffman001@umb.edu.

Looking forward to learning from your experiences.

Best,
Rachel Hoffman
PhD Candidate
Urban Education, Leadership, & Policy Studies
University of Massachusetts Boston

Survey Consent Form (electronic, from Qualtrics site):

University of Massachusetts Boston
Department of Leadership in Education
100 Morrissey Boulevard
Boston, MA. 02125-3393

Consent Form For English Learner Identification and Placement Study

Introduction and Contact Information
You are asked to take part in a research project that examines the process of English Learner Identification and Placement in the Wakefield Public Schools. The researcher is Rachel Hoffman, a PhD student in the Urban Education, Leadership, and Policy Studies Program at UMass Boston. Please read this form and feel free to ask questions. If you have further questions later, Rachel will discuss them with you. Her telephone number is 781-691-3477. You may also contact Dr. Wenfan Yan, Rachel's advisor, at 617-287-4873.

Description of the Project:
This study is looking at the English Learner identification and placement process. Participation in this survey will take approximately 5 minutes. If you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to complete the survey on Qualtrics. The survey will ask whether you would like to participate in a focus group. The focus group will last 45-60 minutes and will be voluntary. Focus group participants will receive a $5 Dunkin' (Donuts) gift card.

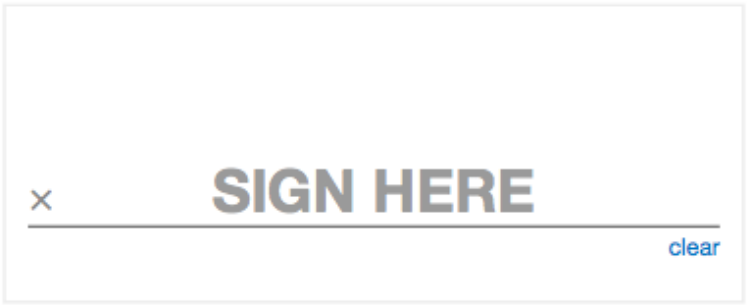
Risks or Discomforts:
The primary risk associated with this study is minimal and no greater than what is ordinarily encountered in daily life. You may speak with me to discuss any distress or other concerns related to your participation in the study.

Confidentiality and Anonymity:
Your part in this research is confidential. That is, the information gathered for this project will not be published or presented in a way that would allow anyone to identify you. Information gathered for this project will be stored in a locked file cabinet and only the research team will have access to the data. Digital information will be stored securely in a password-protected Qualtrics account.

Voluntary Participation:
The decision whether or not to take part in this research study is voluntary. If you do decide to take part in this study, you may terminate participation at any time without consequence. If you wish to terminate participation, you should e-mail Rachel at Rachel.Hoffman001@umb.edu. Whatever you decide will in no way affect your role in the Wakefield Public Schools.

Rights:
You have the right to ask questions about this research before you sign this form and at any time during the study. You can reach Rachel Hoffman at 617-691-3477 or Rachel.Hoffman001@umb.edu or Dr. Wenfan Yan at 617-287-4873 or Wenfan.Yan@umb.edu. If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please contact a representative of the Institutional Review Board (IRB), at the University of Massachusetts, Boston, which oversees research involving human participants. The Institutional Review Board may be reached at the following address: IRB, Quinn Administration Building-2-080, University of Massachusetts Boston, 100 Morrissey Boulevard, Boston, MA 02125-3393. You can also contact the Board by telephone or e-mail at (617) 287-5374 or at human.subjects@umb.edu.

Signatures
I HAVE READ THE CONSENT FORM. MY QUESTIONS HAVE BEEN ANSWERED. MY SIGNATURE ON THIS FORM MEANS THAT I CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY. I ALSO CERTIFY THAT I AM 18 YEARS OF AGE OR OLDER.



Audio Recording Consent

UMASS BOSTON INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

CONSENT TO AUDIOTAPING & TRANSCRIPTION

Teacher Perspectives on English Learner Identification
Rachel Hoffman
Department of Leadership in Education

This study involves the audio taping of your interview/focus group with the researcher. Neither your name nor any other identifying information will be associated with the audiotape or the transcript. Only the researcher and professional transcription service personnel will be able to listen to the tapes.

The tapes will be transcribed by the researcher and/or a professional transcription service and erased once the transcriptions are checked for accuracy. Transcripts of your interview may be reproduced in whole or in part for use in presentations or written products that result from this study. Neither your name nor any other identifying information (such as your voice) will be used in presentations or in written products resulting from the study.

Immediately following the interview, you will be given the opportunity to have the tape erased if you wish to withdraw your consent to taping or participation in this study.

By signing this form you are consenting to

- ❑ having your interview taped;
- ❑ to having the tape transcribed;
- ❑ use of the written transcript in presentations and written products.

By checking the box in front of each item, you are consenting to participate in that procedure.

This consent for taping is effective until the following date: **March 1, 2020**. On or before that date, the tapes will be destroyed.

Participant's Signature _____Date_____

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